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BLACKHAWK, THE BANDIT;

OR,

THE INDIAN SCOUT.

BY PERCY B. ST. JOHN.

NEW YORK:
BEADLE AND ADAMS, PUBLISHERS,
98 WILLIAM STREET.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1883, by
BEADLE AND COMPANY,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of the United States for the
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BLACKHAWK, THE BANDIT.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGE MEETING.

NIGHT upon the Pampas and the forest, whose green breast-work pressed the billowy swells of the Texan prairie like a bastion against which the winds might beat in vain. Two travelers halt before this bastion, as if to repose under its protecting shadows. The one, in dress and appearance, was clearly a white man; the other was no less certainly an Indian. Both were clothed with extreme plainness.

The aboriginal wore a red hunting-shirt, and leggings of mountain goat-skin, with buck moccasins, while a rifle and a small ax were his only arms. The tinge of his countenance and his peculiar features alone gave token of his being a native of the wilds, which his accouterments in no wise demonstrated to be the case.

The garb of the white man was similar, while his naturally fair skin, tanned by constant exposure, was not much lighter than that of his companion. In the stout, bearded hunter, of marked features and sturdy frame, we have a young English naval officer, named Edward Blake, who, disappointed in his expectations of a commission—the Texan navy not being as yet formed—had started to pass the time on a long journey into the interior, for adventure and sport.

Both seemed truly weary from the effects of their day's journey across the wilderness, and drew rein with every appearance of extreme satisfaction, such as is seldom more warmly experienced than when, after hard riding for some ten hours, one prepares to stretch the weary limbs, and, in the very changing action of walking, to find relief.

Behind them was a vast prairie—a very ocean of high grass, one of those picturesque and deep-clad rolling meadows of Upper Texas, stretching away as far as the eye could reach,

and over which they had traveled since the morning. Before them lay a narrow opening in the belt of trees—a slight gap or break, leading to some forest path or woodland glade. At no great distance, on their right, and somewhat in their rear, an island of timber contributed to the scenic effect of the whole.

“Well, red-skin,” exclaimed the young officer, “I really can not advance any further; I am dead beat, thoroughly worn out, and must rest.”

“Good,” replied the Indian; “here camp.”

“I am glad of it,” continued Blake; “and if you would only converse a little more, friend Chinchea, we might pass another very tolerable evening in the woods.”

Chinchea replied not, but, leading the way, and entering within the arches of the forest, they soon found themselves in the center of a green glade, surrounded on all sides by a dense mass of wood. Not more than a dozen yards across, with tall trees, vines, and thick undergrowth compassing it about with a huge, half-burnt log as a foundation for a fire, with a very mountain of dry wood piled up in one corner (it being a favorite hunting-camp of the Waccos), it wanted but the presence of a rippling stream to render it the very ideal of a forest encampment.

“Good camp,” said the Indian, with sententious gravity, leaping from his steed; “white man light fire—Indian stake mustangs.”

“Agreed,” replied the young man, speedily disburdening his weary animal of all trappings save his lariatte; and drawing forth a flint, steel, and a supply of punk, a species of fungus which admirably serves the purpose of tinder, he proceeded to light a fire.

Blake in another moment was alone in the solitude of that gloomy forest cove, on the very verge of the wild Indian country, with naught to depend on for liberty or life, save the sagacity and honor of his Wacco guide.

Disappointed in his hope of obtaining an immediate berth in the Texan navy, the “Young Middy,” ever venturous and fond of excitement, had started on an expedition to visit the tribe to which his companion belonged. He was now a tolerable backwoodsman; entering into every feature of his new

life with a spirit that betokened the zest with which he enjoyed it.

From the huge trunk of an aged sycamore near at hand, whose boughs spread in leafy grandeur far and wide, he speedily drew a handful of dry Spanish moss, which, with dead grass and leaves, formed the foundation of his fire. Twigs, boughs and sticks served for the second layer, over which logs were heaped. A spark waved backward and forward in the air, and soon produced a cheerful blaze. This placed below the pile, and gently fanned, speedily kindled the whole mass.

Blake was too intent upon his occupation to notice the return of Chinchea, who glided to his side, and drawing forth several slices of venison, the whole stock of provisions they now owned, proceeded to broil them over the smoky fire. Blake, seated on part of the log against which the fire rested, looked on admiringly. His journey had been long, and without rest or refreshment the whole of that day, which made him regard the Indian's proceedings with complacency.

Suddenly came a cry so unearthly and horrible as to make Blake start with horror to his feet.

"What infernal whoop is that? Is the forest alive with devils?" cried Blake.

"White wolf," said Chinchea, calmly, turning the unbroiled side of his venison to the fire, and examining it with an appearance of much gusto. "Howl, *much* ugly!"

The restless neighing of the affrighted horses prevented the immediate reply of Edward, who stood still, bewildered by the sudden surprise. Nothing can be conceived more wildly lugubrious, more unearthly, than the howl of the prairie-wolf at eventide. It rings out across the plains, first in a low how! how! how! and gradually rising, it becomes at length fearfully horrible.

"You are right, Chinchea," said the young man, after a pause; "they do howl most frightfully. If the Comanche war-whoop be more horrible than that, I am in no hurry to hear it."

Chinchea replied not, though a grim smile played round his mouth; and handing the meat to Blake to finish, he took up their water-gourd, and went out, but soon returned, and

as he laid his finger in a warning manner upon his lips, Blake instantly knew that something of more than common interest was impending.

"Come," said Chinchea, pointing to his arms; "bad man in forest, close by."

With these words he silently led the way to the wood-pile, whence he took an armful of heavy logs and bushes. These were heaped upon the fire in such a manner as for the time completely to deaden its brightness. Over this they cast leaves and earth; which done, loading themselves with every article of their baggage, not forgetting the venison, they crept with noiseless footsteps toward the horses. Not a word passed; the white man knew too well the exigencies of the case to waste time in idle questions.

Breathless with excitement, Blake followed the movements of the Indian with his eyes, rapidly imitating him in his every act. Chinchea, as soon as they had laden their horses, again dived within the forest, passing the fire, and entering on what, to the young man's surprise, presented all the features of a beaten bridle-path.

"Look!" said the Indian, in a whisper, as, after ascending the side of a somewhat steep acclivity, they suddenly halted. As he spoke, Chinchea caught the young Englishman's arm in his grasp, and pointed through the trees. Blake at once understood the reason of their change of camp.

A small fire in the depth of a hollow revealed a party of no less than thirty men, some Indians, some white, sleeping or watching. While some were rolled in blankets, others less fortunate lay on the bare ground uncovered; a few stood leaning against the trunks of trees, while one who, by his costume, somewhat more military looking than any of the others, appeared to be the chief, was supporting himself with his arms crossed on the muzzle of his rifle. The lurid glare of the fire in that dark and gloomy dell, fell upon the bronzed countenances of the men with singular effect.

It was with little surprise that Blake heard from Chinchea that they were a dreaded gang, commanded by a white man, who roamed about Texas, pillaging and enacting scenes more bloody, ruthless and horrible than any of which the Indians were ever guilty

"Blackhawk," said Chinchea, gravely pointing to the figure we have mentioned as leaning on the muzzle of his gun.

Blake made no reply, save by a slight nod; he was busily engaged in scanning the features of this very man. They were familiar to him, or, at all events, lived in his remembrance; that he had seen him before he felt certain, but at so distant a period it seemed to have been, as to leave the impression of its having occurred previous to his departure from England.

"Hist!" whispered Chinchea, as the blaze of the fire they had left burst forth, a mass of flames.

"A camp!" cried one of the party.

"I see," exclaimed the chief, raising his head calmly, and then, as soon as he had spoken, relapsing gloomily into his thoughtful mood; "slip through the trees, and bring word who and what they are."

"It is time to be moving," whispered Blake, turning toward the place where the Indian had stood, but which was now occupied by his horse only. In the close observation of the movements of the knot below, Edward had not noticed his departure.

Satisfied that his absence was connected with some matter necessary to their safety, the young man turned his eyes again upon those who had caused so serious a change in their movements.

For some brief space of time, no alteration was manifest in the disposition of the extraordinary gang—their camp remained in its pristine quiet. Suddenly a rush, a sound like the heavy but disorderly charge of cavalry, was heard, and every man started to his feet.

"The horses are loose!" cried the chief, with a fearful imprecation.

"Indians!" exclaimed another

"A stampede!" put in a third.

A rush then took place toward the corral which contained the horses, some few remaining on the outskirts of the camp.

In a few minutes Chinchea returned, and, taking the halter of his steed in hand, fell into a cautious trot, in which he was imitated by Blake. In about ten minutes they once more emerged upon the prairie.

"Well, Chinchea," said Blake, "you stampeded these rascals' nags; what do you intend doing now?"

"Camp in wood," said he; "Blackhawk no follow—too busy find horses.

"The sooner the better," exclaimed Blake, for that disappointment about the venison was a serious thing to a hungry man.

At length, pushing away through the bushes and trees for some two hundred yards, another open space presented itself and before the two men, at the distance of about a quarter of a mile, rose the clear outline of a hill stretching to the right and to the left as far as the eye could reach, rising gradually both on its right and left wings.

Edward felt surprised, and his astonishment was in no degree lessened when, advancing up this acclivity, the Indian guided him toward the very summit of the height. He followed, however, in silence, until at length Chinchea halted on the verge of a deep chasm, of very moderate width, not perhaps more than eight or nine feet.

The wind swept by, cold and chilling at that height above the plain, growling and moaning as it flew to bury itself in the deep gloom of the forest; and Edward was about to ask an explanation of his guide choosing this inclement spot for a camp, when the voice of the Indian made itself heard, in a series of cries, of a most peculiar and startling description.

"Why, Chinchea—"

The young man's speech was cut short by an event which added not a little to his astonishment. Chinchea's cries at first brought no answer, but, after a few moments, they were successful.

"Who calls at this hour?" exclaimed a voice on the other side of the chasm, in good and plain English, spoken with a purity which surprised the young sailor.

"Chinchea," replied the Indian; "Blackhawk in the woods."

"Heaven defend you, then," replied the voice; "I will lower the bridge and then you pass quickly."

A creaking noise, like the turning of a wheel, followed, and a huge black mass, which before had all the appearance of a portion of the face of the rock, came slowly down, and in a few moments offered a passage to the fugitives.

Edward Blake, between astonishment and weariness, was totally unable to speak; and following Chinchea across the drawbridge which had so unexpectedly presented itself, and passing quite silently, in imitation of his guide, two figures whom he met, he was in a few minutes dazzled and confounded by the blaze of a huge fire.

The log-house into which they had entered was of tolerably large dimensions, and composed, apparently, of one room.

To the right of the door was the fireplace, a deep hollow, piled up with heavy, hissing logs of wood, which emitted a heat most welcome to the wearied Englishmen, and creating a grateful glow in pleasant contrast to the cold he had so recently experienced, while the fragrant odor of the wood was most agreeable to the senses.

Chinchea had led away the horses, and ushered Edward Blake, alone, into this welcome shelter.

"Hush!" said the Indian, gliding in next moment loaded with the bedding; "house master good man, but no talk of great country over water; bad done him there; he never forgive."

Chinchea then slipped away, without giving time for any questions, leaving our young adventurer still more puzzled than ever.

"My position is certainly a very odd one," thought he; "I have, however, a warm fire, a roof over my head, a supper in prospect; let chance provide the rest."

Two individuals at this moment entered the room. One, of middle height, stout, and of singularly muscular frame, at once attracted the young Briton's attention. He was a man of about forty-five years of age, in the full enjoyment of the muscular vigor that is incident to his time of life. His face was thin and long, not even the intervention of a mustache serving to break the very glaring character of this defect. His eyes were small, gray, and suspicious in their glances. His nose slightly aquiline; his mouth wearing, on almost all occasions, a bitter and saturnine expression; while the chin, somewhat full and round, gave a look of sensuality to a countenance which, in its main characteristics, was intellectual. His forehead was the most remarkable feature about him, being so high as fairly to occupy much more than a third of

the whole length of his face. This gave him an imposing and majestic air, despite the rudeness of his garments. His hair was thin and gray, a circumstance which Edward noted with much curiosity.

A green hunting-frock of coarse materials, a common cotton handkerchief round the throat, pantaloons of deer-skin, with moccasins and a wampum-belt, were his attire. A brace of huge pistols, a short cutlass, and a heavy double-barreled rifle, were his visible arms.

Behind this remarkable figure, and reaching no higher than his waist, stood a man of some fifty years of age, whose appearance was startling. Without any deformity of shape, his extreme littleness was in itself a defect. Only four feet ten in height, with sandy whiskers and mustache, as well as hair, with little hands and feet, like those of a woman, his costume was exactly similar to that of his companion; his rifle, however, being of slight and elegant workmanship, and single-barreled. The expression of his countenance was far from agreeable; his eye appearing to penetrate your inmost thoughts.

"You have been in danger of the woods, stranger," said the master of the house, somewhat gruffly, laying by his arms, and advancing toward his guest, who was seated by the fire.

"There you go, Philip," said the little man, in a shrill voice: "always the same. You never saw this man in your life before—I beg the stranger's pardon, but caution is the first requisite in life—and you lay by your arms, while he's studded like an Italian with pistols, knives and guns."

Edward rose, his eyes glancing fiercely at the dwarf, while at the same time he disburdened himself of his defensive weapons, which, from habit, he had retained.

"Jones, you are mad," said the man addressed as Philip, turning round with a glance no less fierce than that of our young Englishman; "you seem to take every man for a cut-throat."

"I do, until I know the contrary," said Jones, calmly.

"Sir, you are welcome," said Philip, turning contemptuously from the dwarf; "I trust you will excuse the eccentricities of my friend, Mr. Jones'."

"Yes, sir, his friend," repeated the dwarf, somewhat testily.

ly; "and the first duty of friendship is caution for those we feel an affection for."

"Sir," replied Edward, with a smile, "I am a stranger, and, as the Scripture hath it, you have taken me in; I know too well the gratitude due to your hospitality, to feel for one moment hurt at the jokes of your companion. A true-born Englishman never—"

"There! there!" muttered Jones, with a look of strange meaning, intended for Mr. Philip; "you hear what he says—a true-born Englishman. Well, I never! who would have thought any of the real islanders would have ventured up here?"

"I was but following a very worthy example," said Edward Blake, with a smile. "From Chinchea, I learn that you are my countrymen."

"Our renown is not very extensive," remarked he called Philip, quietly; "few white men penetrate so far as the Eagle's Nest, save trappers and hunters, whom we always welcome. But come, here is Chinchea, and I suppose supper will be no unwelcome break in the conversation."

This concluded, Blake entered fully into every detail in connection with Blackhawk—the position he occupied, and the number and nature of his forces; while Chinchea also added to the stock of information, addressing the master of the house in his own Wacco dialect, which the other appeared to speak fluently.

"His design is certainly upon this place," said Philip, after he had heard both stories, "there being no other location within fifty miles. However, he shall have a warm reception; we are two dead shots—Chinchea is another; while you, sir," addressing Edward, "will, I suppose, lend the aid of your arms?"

"With pleasure," replied the young man, who now began to believe himself in reality in the thick of an adventure. "I do not boast much of my shooting acquirements, but a year's experience in Texas will always go for something."

"You may chance before sundown to-morrow to gather further experience," replied the other; "a skirmish like this we have before us, is no trifle in a man's existence."

"I shall summon you before dawn," added Philip, "and

would therefore advise your taking rest. Yonder hammock will, with the aid of your blankets, be very comfortable."

"Many thanks," replied Blake, "but do I deprive you of—"

"By no means," said the other. "Jones and I never sleep in this house. We live here and give accommodation to strangers at times. On the morrow, however, you will find this but a small part of our residence."

With these words, the two men took their arms and went out, leaving Blake and the Indian alone.

The latter was soon fast asleep before the fire, and Edward, though little inclined for slumber, climbed into the hammock, wrapping his blankets round him, having the universal accompaniment of every Texan traveler in his mouth—a pipe of real Virginia—he passed in review the events of one of the most remarkable days of his existence, and then sunk into profound repose.

CHAPTER II.

ALICE, THE DAUGHTER OF THE WEST.

THE situation of the Eagle's Nest was singularly and strikingly picturesque.

An isolated and bare rock rose in the chops, as it were, of a narrow valley, and was separated from the sloping hill which fell perpendicular from its crest on the side facing the rock, by a deep chasm not unlike a thread of silver—it was so jagged and precipitous on all its four faces, as seemingly to be impenetrable. The surface was uneven in the extreme, here a point jutting up, and there a deep hole sinking, and to no one would it have offered any features attractive as a residence, save to one whose principal object was security.

On each side were lofty hills, the branches of a common chain broken by the valley, the mouth of which the rock above alluded to almost closed. Covered by a deep canopy of forest they were too far distant to render their height of

any advantage to a besieger, while the hill, the summit of which approached within eight feet, was so commanded as to be completely useless also to any foe, however daring and bold.

From the skirt of the wood on this side unto the Eagle's Nest, over the glassy plain which swept in a gentle slope upward to the rock, the distance was about half a mile, its monotony broken only by a grove of fir, not more than fifty yards distant from the habitation, and which presented all the marks of having once reached to the very crest of the hill—the intervening space having been cleared in order to provide logs for building, and also for firewood.

The rock itself was surrounded on all sides by a wall of stone, rude and unplastered, while exactly opposite the spot on which Chinchea and young Blake had stood on the night of their arrival, was the drawbridge, which, when up, served the purpose of a gate to defend the narrow aperture left for the purpose of entry. Behind this, leaving first a small courtyard, was the log-hut occupied by the travelers, while on each side, reaching from it to the stone rampart, were out-houses. Behind this, and perched on the summit of a small table rock, was another edifice.

Like the first, it was formed of huge unsquared logs, without windows, though several loops served for that purpose; its roof was of treble shingle, and was surmounted by a bare pole, that had all the air of a flag-staff, even to the hal-yards destined to haul up whatever colors the owner of the retreat had a mind to unfurl.

The remainder of the surface of the rock, in all about an acre and a half, was composed of *corrals* for the cattle, both horned and others, which owned the sway of the strange beings who dwelt in this sequestered spot.

Young Blake, at an early hour, stood surveying the features of the scene with a zest and interest which increased rather than diminished, as his eyes took in all the varied beauties of the landscape, illuminated as it was by the rising sun, that over all shed its crimson glories, as it crept slowly upward in the eastern sky.

While his thoughts were busy with the past, and his eyes glancing over the superb landscape which lay at his feet, a

slight rustling at his elbow caused him to turn. It was Chinchea.

"Good camp," said the Indian, "better place--woods bad--scalp gone 'fore morning."

Blake scanned him with a scrutinizing air.

"Chinchea," said he, "you are my friend?"

"Ugh!" replied the Indian, assuming an air of grateful remembrance--the immediate origin of their connection being Blake's assiduity in attending him during a severe illness at Houston.

"Chinchea remembers the day when his white brother gave him physic in the great village?"

The Indian assented.

"What is my name?" asked the young man.

"Blake," replied the Wacco, pronouncing the word with a strong emphasis on the *a*, and nearly omitting the *e*, making it almost Blacke.

"It is," said the other; and laying his hand on the Indian's arm, he added, "I have a strange fancy, I know not why, that my name should remain a secret with these people."

"No business of Indian to know white man's name; Chinchea got no long tongue like a squaw."

"But I must have a name. It would be unpolite to decline giving one," mused Blake.

"Call himself Little Bear," grunted the red-skin.

"A very fine appellation, no doubt," said the young man, with a smile, "but under the circumstances I think I shall adopt Brown."

"Brown--good," said the Wacco, whose long intercourse with the whites had made him an adept in their tongues, "when tired call Brown--speak, and Indian call him other name."

This was said with a quaint gravity that fairly overcame the Englishman; he laughed outright.

"Well, I do not think I shall adopt any more aliases," said he; "but Brown is a good traveling name, it leaves no great mark behind."

While the young man yet spoke, the voice of his host of the preceding night hailed him from the door of the hut.

"Good-morning, sir," exclaimed he, advancing as he spoke,

"What think you now of our Eagle's Nest, Mr.—" he paused.

"Brown--Edward Brown," said our hero, "your position is certainly well chosen, and might be defended against vast odds."

"You think so," said the other, with glistening eyes. "I am glad of it, and as I fancy we shall soon try the experiment, I hope your word may come true."

"I hope so too, Mr.—" our hero hesitated, imitating the other's manner to the life.

"Philip Stevens," said he, dryly, and yet with a smile at Blake's manner.

"There! there!" muttered a voice at his elbow, "what occasion is there for you a-bawling out your name in that way. There is no occasion for everybody to know your name, Philip."

"And if they do, no great harm is done," said Philip, fiercely; "my name is not one that I care much to hide. And if I did, in this country we are pretty much our own masters."

"There! there! you are so impatient," said Jones' advancing. "I did not mean any thing, and only spoke for your good. Breakfast is ready."

"Mr. Brown," said Philip Stevens, turning to our hero, "the keen air of this lofty rock has doubtless whetted your appetite."

"I am already sufficiently of a Texan never to refuse a good offer," replied Blake, following his host, who led the way toward the log hut.

The Indian all this time had leaned motionless against the stone wall, his eyes apparently fixed on vacancy, but in reality watching the countenance of our hero with jealous care. He had divested himself of every sign of civilized garb, and stood ghastly in his war-paint.

When the young Englishman set his foot upon the threshold of the log hut, his surprise knew no bounds, though he did his utmost to conceal so very great an evidence of inexperience.

At the head of the table sat a young girl, while four men, besides his host and Jones, simultaneously took their seats.

A vacant place was pointed out to Blake beside the first, near Philip.

Behind, occupied in laying the various articles of food upon the table, was a glossy, sprightly, laughing-eyed negro lass, whose healthy appearance spoke volumes for the treatment she received.

"My daughter, Mr. Brown; Captain Cephas Doyle, Mr. Brown; my hunters," said Stevens, with a glance of peculiar meaning at the girl.

Edward muttered some incoherent reply, and then the whole party fell to upon the viands, Blake imitating them as much to conceal his surprise as to satisfy his appetite.

Dressed plainly, but in a lady-like manner, of marked beauty, there was a delicacy and grace about this young creature, which astonished and bewildered the Englishman, as by stolen glances he drank every feature of her lovely countenance.

Not more than eighteen, there was a sadness about the expression of her face which added not a little to the guest's curiosity. She did the honors of the table with quiet grace, and seemed by no means inclined to open her lips, while apparently from being so used to strangers, she paid little attention to the new arrival.

For some time Blake spoke not at all, the others snatching an occasional moment to discuss the probabilities of a contest with Blackhawk and his gang.

Captain Cephas Doyle appeared somewhat anxious that the contest should take place, and his warm antipathy to every thing in the shape of an Indian, not even restrained by the presence of Chinchea, who calmly and silently glided into a seat beside Blake—caused the young Briton to survey him a little curiously.

About five-and-twenty, his face was rather broader than is commonly the case with your true Yankee. His eyes were small, gray, and keen; his nose broad and straight; his mouth large, with thick lips, while his chin was somewhat overburdened with fat; he wore neither mustache nor whiskers. His costume was much the same as our hero's.

"What is your opinion, Miss Stevens?" said young Blake, addressing the daughter of his host.

"Well, I conclude no female has much of an idea in them partiklers," interrupted Captain Cephas Doyle, hastily; "I reckon they are about ignorant on that p'int."

"My opinion, Mr. Brown," said the young lady appealed to, without noticing the captain's interruption, "is, that God made all his creatures in his image, and that while he has given one color to one, and to another a different hue, he has granted a soul unto all. In my opinion a man is to be judged by his acts, not by the color of his skin."

Edward Blake and Alice Stevens, the ice being once broken, opened a *tête-à-tête* conversation, which was speedily carried on with animation on both sides. Edward was delighted with his companion, whose elegant tastes, refined language, and sound knowledge surprised him. All the accomplishments of her sex appeared familiar to her, while the rich stores of English, French and Italian literature were equally well known. As soon as the young girl found that her neighbor was one who could converse like a gentleman; who spoke without using the backwoods slang; whose education had been that of a scholar; who had traveled much and observed men and manners—then all her reserve vanished. So animated did her talk become, indeed, that they scarcely noticed the departure of the greater number of their guests from the table.

CHAPTER III.

PIETRO, THE SCOUT.

ABOUT three miles to the west of the Eagle's Nest, is a spot very different in its characteristics from that which we have just described; the hills and the wood in this instance being in close contact, the former even nestling over the latter, in an overhanging cliff some fifty feet high. Beside this rise the fir, the sycamore, the cedar, and the oak, their tall heads waving over the summit of the precipice.

Between the skirt of the wood and the lower part of the rocky hight was left a small space, which, being favorable for

all purposes of concealment, and being protected from the weather, had often been the retreat of travelers.

On the morning of which we have already spoken, it was occupied by a tent, formed by a few poles leaned against the rock, and over which a large cloth had been cast. In front of this was a fire, round which several packs formed commodious and comfortable seats. On them were seated three men, of whom one was evidently a man of superior rank, while the others were as clearly his servants.

About sixty years of age, with swarthy complexion, hair as black as jet, eyes large, piercing and fiery, his costume was that of a Mexican *caballero* of the first rank. His lofty steeple hat of white felt was ornamented with much bullion; his jacket was striped with various colors, his pantaloons were covered with embroidery, while over all was cast a splendid *poncho*—a Mexican blanket.

"I wish Pietro would return," said the master—speaking in that mixed Spanish and Indian dialect which has, in the present day, been dignified by the name of the Mexican language—"for if he be right in supposing that men of evil disposition are in the forest, the sooner we reach shelter the better."

"Pietro is a clever lad, Don Juan," replied the elder of the two domestics, "and I warrant me he was not mistaken."

"And yet a distant vapor may have been taken for smoke," observed Don Juan de Chagres.

"Pietro is too used to the woods," said the old servant, shaking his head; "he has been among these wild Texans since he was a child."

"True—true!" said their master, "and the more reason, therefore, for our taking a meal. Here comes the signora, and we will breakfast."

The domestics rose, while their master quietly drew forth a cigarette, and lighting it, puffed away, as if he fancied it a necessary preliminary to the coming meal.

The tent opened as he spoke, and there issued therefrom a young woman, in the full pride of her beauty, not a little brightened by the fresh air which came murmuring through the trees.

About two-and-twenty, a brunette, with large, speaking eyes ; a mouth delicate, small and rosy ; hair glossy, and jet as the raven's wing ; her person had all the fullness and rounded grace of womanhood, with the light, airy step of a girl. The chief defect, perhaps the only one in her beautiful features, was the lowness of the forehead.

Her costume was the usual graceful walking-dress of Mexican ladies, who, though their darkness be like the embrowning of fruit that tells of the richness within, yet want the charming skins and rosy complexions of our fair countrywomen. The principal feature in her costume was the *reboso*, or mantilla, which, flung gracefully over the left shoulder, and passed across the mouth, left nothing but the eyes visible. This is all the more necessary, because Mexican female costume is but little without it ; one garment only, beside the petticoat, being worn, braced with a sash round the waist.

Taking her seat upon a pack opposite the old man, the young woman signified her readiness to partake of the meal which had been prepared, and which, despite the rudeness of the spot, would have been despised by no traveler in any part of the world.

"Where is Pietro?" said the lady, addressing the elder domestic, as she sipped her chocolate.

"Pietro is in the woods, signora," replied the servant, "the lad thinks he has seen enemies within the gloom of the forest."

"*Santa Maria!*" exclaimed the signora, with a start, "then why sit we here so calmly?"

"It would be unwise to move, until we are certain in which direction our enemies lie. There might be such a thing as falling into their very jaws."

"This comes of these wild journeys," replied the signora, with a sneer ; "were we quietly at home in Santa Fé, there would be no such fears."

"There would be worse," continued Don Juan de Chagres ; "your own countrymen, when enemies, are more dangerous than even the Texans."

"*Santa Maria, madre de Dios!*" cried the young woman, as a rustling was heard in the bushes, "what noise is that?"

"Pietro!"

As the elder domestic spoke, a young man, half Indian, half Mexican, in the many-colored garb of the latter country, and armed with a heavy short rifle, large pistols, and a small ax, stepped forth from the cover of the woods.

"What news, Pietro?" cried the signora.

"Blackhawk is in the woods," replied the young man, with a slight shudder.

At the period we speak of, the gang of marauders commanded by Blackhawk had, by a series of atrocities of a most frightful character, gained a very widely extended reputation. Now appearing on the border settlements of Texas, now on those of Mexico, this gang defied retaliation by the swiftness of its movements. Indians, Mexicans, and Texans alike, were bent on its destruction, it being composed of outcasts from the three races, who treated all they met with as enemies.

"Bring up the mules," cried the master, "we will return upon our steps."

"To advance would be better, Signor Don Juan," said Pietro, who was satisfying his hunger; "there is a white settlement not three miles ahead," and in a few words described the position of the Eagle's Nest.

"Doubtless, the post of these thieves," said the terrified signora.

"By no means," exclaimed the signor; "I know the owner. It is Signor Filippo Stephano, a brave Englishman."

"Then," said the signora, rising, "let us hence."

The mules, eight in number, with five horses, were now brought up and hastily loaded. In less than a quarter of an hour, the whole party, with the exception of Pietro, were *en route*. Having given ample directions to the others, he remained behind, intending once more to creep within sight of the terrible gang, whose chief had given to it so unenviable reputation.

Pietro stood in the skirt of the wood, watching the disappearance of his companions, and was about to turn to see the shelter of the forest, when some sudden and inexplicable impulse induced him to glide beneath the shelter of the rock, and by standing motionless against its blackened and cracked surface, his body seemed to blend with its shadow.

Next moment the face of an Indian peered through the trees in the direction of the retreating party, whose forms were not yet quite concealed in the distance, and then, after a rapid survey of the late encampment, he stepped forth into the open space.

About six feet high, hideous as paint and ugliness could make him, naked, save round the middle, and armed with musket, cutlass, and knife, Pietro at once recognized him as an Apache, a tribe to which he, in common with most of his countrymen, bore the most deadly and unextinguishable hatred.

"Waugh!" said the Indian, with much satisfaction, shaking his fist in the direction in which the fugitives had just disappeared; and with this one word he advanced into the center of the open space, and presently strode up toward the rock, where he stood beside the dying embers of the fire.

He was now but eight feet distant from Pietro, who lay hid behind a projection of the rock to the Indian's left. The young Mexican, however, was too experienced a woodsman not to know that, in the present instance, continued concealment was hopeless; and accordingly he determined to have the advantage of a surprise, before the Indian could retreat a step, rushed forward, and gaining a position beside the enemy, in one bound, he grappled with the huge Apache.

Pietro's hands were incumbered with his rifle, as were those of the Indian with his musket, and in the hurry exhibited by each to gain a hold upon the other, their weapons met, crossed, and were blended into one, each clutching his own and that of his enemy with terrific force.

The Indian gave vent to his never failing "ugh!" and then the combatants paused, face to face, gazing intently one at the other.

Pietro was shorter than his foe, but he was muscular, and full of strength; still, had not the other been enervated by drink, there would have been little doubt as to the superiority of the man of the woods.

Neither spoke, each striving to wrest the murderous weapon from his opponent's grasp.

They writhed, they jerked, they seemed about to tear their very arms from their sockets; now Pietro cast the Indian

half to the ground, and now the Apache would dash the Mexican from his feet.

Again they struggled, their hands burying themselves, in appearance, in the iron barrels, until at length they slipped together, and came tumbling headlong to the ground, both guns exploding at same moment.

The Indian sprung to his feet, and waving his heavy cutlass, rushed upon the Mexican; but Pietro, coolly cocking a heavy horseman's pistol, shot him through the heart, and he fell dead, with a yell that waked the dying echoes of the forest and the rocks.

Seizing his own arms and those of his enemy, the young and victorious Mexican plunged at once on the trail of his master and mistress, whom he speedily overtook.

Pietro, much fatigued, indeed completely worn out with his struggle and subsequent pursuit of his friends, mounted his horse, and having regained his breath, related what had passed.

"Those reports will bring the whole party to the camp," exclaimed Don Juan, "and our trail will be the next object of pursuit."

"We are much ahead of the ruffians," said Pietro, "and will gain the shelter, I hope, before they can catch us. See! yonder is the Nest."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ATTACK.

WHEN Edward and Alice were left alone, a momentary embarrassment ensued. Alice seemed subdued and mournful, while the young sailor, much struck by the gentleness, beauty and seemingly graceful mind of his companion, began to feel somewhat doubtful as to the precise nature of the feelings which were, even at that early stage of their acquaintance, rising in his bosom with regard to this bird of the Eagle's Nest.

"Do you intend remaining long in Texas, Mr. Brown?" said Alice, first breaking the brief silence.

"I left England, and came to Texas with the intention of remaining altogether," replied Edward.

"And do you still adhere to so rash a determination?" said Miss Stevens, with the faintest shadow of a smile.

"At home I have no friends," observed Blake, somewhat sadly. "I have lost all—parents, friends and, by some strange chance, fortune itself. I am now a species of adventurer, a soldier, or rather a sailor of fortune, and, therefore, where my subsistence is to be obtained, there is my country."

"But do you not regret England, your real home?"

This was said curiously, and with some degree of anxiety.

"Every Englishman does, who is worthy of the name," answered Edward. "Circumstances may render his native land an undesirable residence; he may find an easier living elsewhere; but he will ever long for his only *home*."

"Ah, Mr. Brown," said Alice, warmly, "I that know little of my country—that was a mere child when I left it—still yearn for England—for that land that my imagination paints as little short of a paradise. I see the beauty of this wild and romantic position; I enjoy to the full the luxury of its pure air, its delightful scenery, its glorious mornings, and, alas, as in life, still more glorious evenings. Its sunrises and sunsets charm and delight me, but I ever feel some secret want here, which, I fear me, never will be supplied."

"And this want—" said Edward, despite himself, eagerly.

"Is companionship; I know not why. I that live and have my being among hunters, trappers, and wild Indians, should by rights assimilate myself unto them, but I can not do so. Their ideas and mine do not harmonize; their conversation is distasteful to me; their thoughts and feelings are foreign to my nature, and I feel alone."

"I comprehend you fully, Miss Stevens," replied Edward, after a pause; "and can only ascribe your sensations to an innate appreciation of female dignity; and to the fact that neither birth nor education originally fitted you for the wilds."

Edward Blake kept his eyes fixed keenly on the counte-

nance of the young girl as he spoke, with a view to gather from its expression if his ideas were correct or not. Alice changed color rapidly, and for a moment made no reply. Some chord had been touched, which vibrated to the heart of the listener.

"We are very new friends, Mr. Brown," said she, at length, with some little more of distance in her manner, "to be thus cross-examining one another's feelings. Supposing that, instead of thus speculating, I were to show you the secrets of the Eagle's Nest."

"With pleasure," replied Edward, not, however, without some slight evidence of pique in his manner, and rising at the same time; "this romantically named habitation should have many curious features. But, believe me not impertinent if I have cross-examined you; it has been because I have taken an interest in one whom I see removed from all fitting society."

"Impertinent! oh, no!" said Alice, turning, and giving her hand to the young sailor; "but I am peculiarly circumstanced, and you must not always ask me to explain either my acts or my words."

"In me, then, find a friend in whom to trust," said Edward, warmly.

Alice replied not, but turned again toward the door, and led the way into the courtyard. On a little rising mound, that reached nearly to the summit of the stone battlements of the Nest, stood the whole party connected with that locality, gazing out upon the vast prospect that lay in front. Of these Miss Stevens took not the slightest notice, though Philip glanced with an approving smile toward the young couple, but opening a little wicket to the left, another courtyard, or rather division of the surface of the rock, was gained.

It was about ten yards square, and had been covered with a thin layer of mold, divided into beds by paths of shingle and pebbles, and was dignified by the name of Alice's garden.

The prominent building alluded to above, and which appeared the keep of the castle, formed one side of the young girl's garden, and toward this Alice led the way into the lower

room. It was a small apartment, and, for the locality, well furnished with many a little feminine luxury. To the surprise and great gratification of Edward Blake, several books and a guitar lay prominently on a table.

"You have many things here, Miss Stevens, to which in the wilds one is usually a stranger," said the young Englishman.

"They are remnants of the past, of which some day you may know more," replied Alice. "The books are at your service, and, if you play, so is the guitar."

"I play a little," said Edward; "but would, if you object not, converse of this wild spot."

The young sailor unconsciously took up a book, and it opened at the flyleaf.

A name had been in it, and more, an engraved one, surmounted by a coronet; but much pains had been taken to erase and efface all sign of what had once existed. Struck with surprise, Edward, forgetting that the girl's eyes were upon him, fixed his glance curiously upon it, and endeavored to decipher the name which had been blazoned on the page.

Blake thought he could faintly trace the arms and words, and as he did so he turned faint, while a deadly pallor overspread his face.

"You are unwell," said Alice, who had been a strangely interested spectator of this little scene.

"It is nothing," replied Edward, recovering himself, and laying down the book; "but I hear a bustle without; my assistance may be wanted."

"You will be summoned fast enough," said Alice, "but that you may see all that is going on, let us ascend to the roof of this block."

The sailor, whose ideas were in a complete whirl, obeyed, and preceded the young lady, knowing that, all over the world, it is etiquette in going up a ladder.

It was a level esplanade, with four guns, one commanding each side of the Eagle's Nest. To mask their presence the port-holes were closed. Each taking one as a seat, the new friends sat down. Neither appeared much inclined for conversation. Edward was pondering on a long-forgotten sub-

ject, brought forcibly and painfully to his mind, he knew not why, while Alice was dwelling on the somewhat strange manner of her countryman.

Blake was leaning over the parapet—his eye wandering carelessly down the slope toward the forest—when the Mexican party burst from the woods, making hastily for the Eagle's Nest. Both Alice and he rose with some anxiety, as the manner of the fugitives sufficiently explained the reason of their hurry.

"Look out, Mr. Brown," said Philip Stevens, turning toward the block, "warm work is commencing."

"Shall I join you?" replied Edward.

"Nay; you can work one of those carronades, I expect."

"With pleasure," cried Blake, all his energy and love of adventure at once effacing any other impression from his mind; "give the word, and I will serve them with a vengeance."

At this moment, the fugitives being half across the prairie, the band of pursuers came whooping, yelling, and rushing from half-a-dozen different points of the forest; and from the quickness of their movements, compared with the slow progress of the heavily laden mules, they appeared certain to overtake them. Blake's heart leaped within him, for he saw that a woman was among the flying party, and the native gallantry of his character tempted him to risk all, to save her from the gang in pursuit. The Mexicans were evidently urging their beasts to the very utmost, but Blackhawk and his party were coming up apace.

"Stand by to lower the gangway," said Philip, in a voice which rung through the Eagle's Nest, and bespoke that now he was in his element; "get ready your gun, Mr. Brown; and when the Mexicans turn into the narrow path, give it to the rogues behind."

"Pray, Miss Stevens, go below," said Edward.

"Nay, Mr. Brown, while one of my own sex is in danger, I will remain. Ah! they are close upon them. Heaven preserve the poor lady."

As she spoke, Don Juan de Chagres and his party had reached a narrow beaten trail, which led directly to the en-

trance of the Eagle's Nest, and to enter which, they left what had formerly been the track of a ball from the gun which Blake had leveled at the pursuers. Next instant a loud report and a flash drew all eyes toward the summit of the block, and a ball went plowing up the earth in the very center, of the wild and ferocious band of the renowned Blackhawk. The whole party halted, and next moment the Mexicans were under cover of the rifles of Philip Stevens and his men.

"Served like a true man," cried Stevens, approvingly; "that ball killed no man, but it saved one or two lives. They will now think twice before they attack us, so e'en come down and aid me to receive our new guests."

Alice accompanied Blake toward the portion of the Eagle's Nest through which the Mexicans were, no doubt with heartfelt satisfaction, hurrying. Hearty congratulations were passed, and soon Alice led the young Mexican away to her private chamber.

CHAPTER V.

THE LIVE-OAK CREST.

REPULSED once, the gang, which lay in the woods seeking the destruction of the Eagle's Nest, was little likely to attempt a renewal of the attack, until favored by the dark canopy of night; and the garrison of the stronghold having taken every important precautionary measure, occupied themselves in the minor details of backwoods warfare—casting bullets, preparing patching, filling powder-horns, etc. As Edward had none of these duties to perform, he strolled towards the little garden, and stood at the gate. There he paused when about to raise the latch, as he heard voices, but, recognizing them as those of Alice and the fair Mexican fugitive, whose dazzling beauty had not escaped his notice, he hesitated no longer, but pushed the gate open, and entered.

As he caught sight of them, Edward hardly knew which to admire most—the gentle, fair, and lovely Alice, all retire-

ment, modesty, and blushing beauty, or the proudly handsome and womanly Mexican. They were conversing in Spanish, a language which, in its corrupted form, is familiar to every good Texan.

"I hope, signora, I do not intrude?" said Edward, approaching.

"Say rather that you feel you are doing us a favor, in deigning to throw away your time upon two forlorn damsels," said Margaretta—such was the Mexican's name—in a gay and open manner, such as an Englishwoman would scarcely have assumed after years of intimate acquaintance.

"Mr. Brown is a visitor like yourself," interrupted Alice, quietly, at the same time making way for him upon the seat, "and hospitality requires that we make him free of our castle; the favor, however," she added, with a smile, "is on our side, as this garden is rarely open to visitors."

"Perhaps I am intruding now?" exclaimed Edward, rising, with a slight crimson flush upon his face.

"Nay, you are quite welcome; indeed I am very glad you have come," replied Alice, laughing; "for we were just talking of the strange chance which had made the silent Eagle's Nest suddenly become so gay and bustling."

"Gay, I should hardly say, since we are in a state of siege, which I can scarcely see the end of."

"Indeed," said the Mexican, somewhat eagerly, "shall we then be kept here so long? Do these terrible outlaws seem so determined?"

"Were we beleaguered a week, ay, a month, it would little surprise me," replied Edward.

"Nay, perhaps three months," exclaimed Alice, "for though Blackhawk's gang may not be in sight all the time, they may prowl about until the depth of the winter drives them to the lower settlements."

"Do tell me, who is this terrible Blackhawk?" said the Mexican.

"Ah! who, indeed?" said Edward, gravely.

"I can give little explanation," answered Alice, "save that, less than a year ago, a band, composed of the refuse of the white and Indian population, appeared on the frontiers of the country, doing deeds of robbery and murder. This chief,

whose name is Blackhawk, is said to be a terrible fellow without heart or conscience."

"Have you ever seen him?" asked Edward.

"Nay, Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Alice.

"I have, twice," added Edward, sadly.

"Where?" cried Margaretta.

"Once, a year ago, and again last night. On the first occasion, as Captain Harry Coulter, he robbed me of all I had, while insensible, and in the felon chief I recognized the same personage."

"Captain Harry Coulter!" said Alice, in a faltering voice. "I have heard him spoken of. When we were in New Orleans, Mr. Stevens, that is, my father, had some connection with him; but they quarreled, for he tried to rob my father. I never saw him, however."

"Strange fatality," exclaimed Edward; "but that man's face is as familiar to me as a youthful dream. I know not why it is, but I often catch myself dwelling on his face, in your presence more than at any other time."

"Surely I am not like the monster?" said Alice, with a laugh.

"Mr. Brown is very gallant," added Margaretta, "to say that the presence of a lady reminds him of a bandit."

"Mr. Brown," exclaimed the full, rich voice of Philip Stevens, "dinner is ready; if the ladies be at hand, tell them as much."

The summons was obeyed, and the whole party were speedily congregated, with the exception of Don Juan; but Cephas Doyle and Jones stood apart as Blake entered, eying him with a scowl which showed how little favor he had found in *their* sight. He heeded them not, however, being fully occupied in seating his fair companions.

"I think, Mr. Stevens," remarked Edward, "that considering we are likely to be confined here some time, it would have been better, had this ample store been somewhat husbanded."

"Nay, you would not have me stint my guests," rejoined the other, gayly, "especially with such a store as I have to back me. Think not that I have been taken unawares; I have foreseen some such contingency, and have provided for it."

"There! there!" cried Jones, with a scared countenance, "what business have the gentlemen to know that you expected any thing of the kind?"

"Don't talk at random," replied Philip, with ill-disguised irritation; "mind your dinner, and leave us to converse, as we please. You must excuse him, Mr. Brown, but in his youth he had a fright from which he has never recovered. It has rendered him timid ever since."

"To the walls!" shouted the sentry from without, which cry being followed up by a discharge of gunshot from half a dozen commanding points, the whole garrison rushed to defend the works, leaving the women sole tenants of the apartment.

On reaching the open air, Blackhawk and his gang were found to have occupied every available position round the Eagle's Nest. Behind the trees—on rocks around, seemingly inaccessible, it was clear they had crept; for though, after the first discharge, not a living being could be seen, yet the body of a sentry riddled with musket shot, showed how near and how numerous must have been the volley."

Blake gazed with horror on the bleeding corpse. It was his first sight of blood, and his impression was of a character which at once raised his feelings to a pitch of wild excitement that he had never known before.

"Keep close, every man," said Philip, sternly; "this bloody work is begun in good earnest, and with extermination of one party, it will alone end."

"You, Jones and Doyle, keep the block," he added, after a pause, "and let not a head be seen without firing. They must be met warmly, or we shall have them charging to our very gates. You, William," addressing a tall youth with a huge rifle, "take the Mexicans, and scatter them at the loops around the gate. The rest of you, except Mr. Brown and Chinchea, post yourselves as best you may. First, however, remove the body where the women may not see it—we will bury it to night."

"With others, perchance," said Brown, in a low, but firm voice.

"Perchance not one may remain to do it," answered Philip, with emotion; "but come, I will take you to my council."

chamber ; and there, while we guard that side, we can discuss our plans of defense."

Creeping cautiously along the wall of the Nest, Philip Stevens, followed by Edward and Chinchea, passed the door of the room where they had been dining, and entering a passage, they soon found themselves in a rude bedchamber—that in which Don Juan slept.

It had two doors, while as many had been passed in the passage. One to the left led into the garden, and could be seen from the common room, while the other, which opened into a small apartment, was entered by the party, and Blake now found that he had reached the very edge of the cliff on that side, and that a small and narrow window looked out upon a singular and striking scene.

"Here we are, Mr. Brown, on the summit of the Eagle's Nest," said Stevens ; "look out and you will gaze upon a view rarely surpassed in this part of the world."

And at the first glance Edward grew dizzy. Sheer perpendicular down, almost two hundred feet, went the rock, with a piece shelving outward, about a dozen yards below ; while a gushing stream came tumbling from the opposite side, and fell in white mist into the depths beneath, running round the Nest in two branches, like a ditch.

About a hundred yards across, but towering fifty feet above the little fort, was the summit of the opposite rock, crowned by a covert of live oak and pine, that waved majestically in the breeze.

Scarcely had Edward put his head outside the loop, and taken a hasty view, than Stevens called him away.

"A rifle carries far and true," said Philip, "and if the vermin are not already on yonder rock, they soon will be."

"A lovely scene, truly," mused Edward ; "pity that it should be marred by crime and the struggles of man against man."

"Blackhawk on rock," said Chinchea ; "him gun point at Nest."

"Say you so ?" exclaimed Stevens, and running to the side, he threw open a window overlooking the garden. "Jones," he cried, "stoop low and keep so. The vermin are on the Live Oak Crest—make it too hot to hold them."

"I see you are fully prepared for every contingency," observed Edward; "but, seriously, the contest grows warm, and to be candid, are we strong enough to keep this place against so many?"

"We are not," replied Stevens, coldly.

"Then you expect defeat?"

"Were we all men, I would defy the rascals. We would fight to the last gasp, and then blow up the Nest, and escape by the stream below. But there are women here."

"Then what propose you?" asked Blake, eagerly.

"I propose to gain assistance. We can hold out some days. Camp Comanche is within thirty miles, and if they knew our position, we should next day be free."

"But how is it to be done?"

"Chinchea will go," said the Indian, quietly.

"Of course," replied Philip, still addressing Brown, "the Indian alone could be of use. At nightfall Chinchea will depart, and on the third day we shall see him return backed by a hundred warriors."

"But how can he escape?"

"By this window. Until black night he would be discovered. At an hour after dark we will be here to aid him, until then he will remain here alone."

A loud report, a second, then a third, now proved that the carronades were at work, while the crashing of boughs and the falling of stones, dirt, and fragments of wood, proved that the balls struck the summit of the Live Oak Crest. As fast as they could load, Jones and Doyle kept up their volley, making the echoes rise from every nook and cranny round about. They ceased, and all was still as night, and not a sound or trace of the enemy could be heard or seen.

CHAPTER VI.

A NIGHT WITH DEATH.

It was two hours after sundown, and Philip, accompanied by Edward and Chinchea, stood again in the chamber described in our previous chapter, preparatory to the departure of the latter, who was stripped, and stood erect in his hideous war-paint, while a short knife and tomahawk were suspended from his waist. In his hand was a short and light fusil.

His demeanor was calm and passionless; not a motion, not the faintest contraction of a muscle, betrayed the sense of the perilous enterprise in which he was engaged. In that dim light he was rather the motionless statue of an artist's hand, than a human being.

Near him stood Philip Stevens, holding a dark lantern, with the light so directed as to stream upon the ground, without showing any sign to those without, while Edward Blake knelt at his feet, knotting firmly together the ends of two coils of rope.

"You are an apt hand, Mr. Brown, I perceive," said Philip, with a smile.

"I should be, having been a British sailor," replied the other.

"And you are sure it will bear his weight?"

"It will bear many times as much; and did you not want me here, I would gladly make the trial by descending with him."

"No," said the Indian, bluntly, "pale-face like bear in the dark—no use."

"I knew you would rather not have me," continued Blake, with a laugh; "but I would gladly share your peril. Believe me, Indian, I shall have a load off my mind when I see you return in safety."

The Indian made no reply, but holding out his hand, he took that of the young man, and clutched it with a gripe like that of the animal he had just compared him to.

"Now to see that the coast is clear," said Stevens, as Blake followed him to the window.

The night was dark and tempestuous. The wind whistled round the building, as if about to commence operations for the evening; the fitful gusts which bowed the trees on the crests of the opposite rock were frequent and violent, while the whole sky formed one huge canopy of black vapor.

About twenty feet beneath the Live Oak Crest, however, there was one evidence of cheerfulness and animation. A faint tracery of light arose from behind a ridge of rock, betraying the presence of a fire. It looked like the mouth of a witch's caldron; though not a flame was to be seen. Now and then a shadow passed before it; some one was slowly walking up and down.

"The Indian must pass yonder by that fire," said Philip Stevens; "and how he is to do so unobserved, I can not tell."

"Chinchea will go—he is ready," said the Indian.

Without remark, Edward and Stevens proceeded to attach the rope by a loop to the Indian's waist; who, as soon as this operation was performed, quietly walked to the window, and commenced his perilous descent. His fate was not trusted to one rope alone, for Blake and Stevens each held one, which they gradually lowered.

The rock shelved slightly inward at the summit, and the young warrior, therefore, swung wholly in the air, oscillating fearfully, and performing gyrations which would have turned the head of many a less-nerved man. Those above were careful to lower him as slowly as possible; but presently Stevens, who was looking out to catch a glimpse, nearly overbalanced himself, and for a moment Blake felt the rope running through his hands with fearful rapidity.

"Pull back," cried Stevens, "or he will be dashed to pieces. Curse the rope; if he had trusted to me alone, he would have required no Blackhawk to finish his career."

Both now proceeded with the utmost caution; and after the lapse of about ten minutes, they came to the end of the two ropes; but the weight was as great as ever. The Indian had not reached the shelving rock before mentioned.

"He must be drawn up again," said Stevens, moodily; "we can never let him hang there while I find another cord."

"I will look and endeavor to see how far off he is from his journey's end," replied Blake.

The night was still dark, though a few breaks in the dismal wreaths of clouds permitted a faint ray of light to pass; and, straining his eyes to the utmost, Blake could nearly discover the Indian's position.

"His feet are about a yard from the shelf, and were it wider, we might trust to his fall."

"Not there," cried Stevens; "the shelf slopes downward, and he would fall a hundred and fifty feet into the black abyss."

"Merciful God," exclaimed Blake, as the rope hung loose in their hands, "he is off."

Both thrust their heads through the narrow aperture, listening, with blood that iced in their veins, for the sound which should bear tidings of the Indian's destruction. No sound came; but a second glance showed him standing erect and motionless on the edge of the terrific precipice. Next instant he disappeared.

Drawing a hard breath, like men who had witnessed a providential escape, they drew up the ropes, and found the ends cut by the Indian's knife.

"I have seen many an act of Indian courage and sagacity," cried Stevens, with earnestness, "but never did I see that surpassed. On the brink of a fearful gulf, he preferred risking all, to delay."

"He is a bold fellow, truly," replied Blake, "and this beginning augurs well for the result."

For about an hour they kept their now silent watch, listening with keen and practiced ear for any sound which might guide them as to their envoy's progress, but in vain. Not the faintest footfall could be detected. At length, after straining their eyes and ears to the utmost, they caught sight of a dark form, which for an instant showed itself near the fire on the opposite rock, and then, high on the night-air, rose an awful sound, to which nothing human could be compared. It was a shriek, and yet so mingled with the howling of a panther as to be scarcely distinguishable. They listened again. But all was still.

When Chinchea discovered that by the ropes he could descend no lower, he saw that the shelf of rock below him sloped downward, and that though its surface was uneven, and afforded purchase to the foot, yet that a fall would almost of a certainty precipitate him into the gulf beneath.

The smooth face of the hill against which he swung was, however, broken in one or two places, and jagged. A rapid glance showed him a hole within reach, at which he grasped with his left hand, and, quick as lightning, severing the cords round his waist with the knife which he held in his right, he stood securely upon the shelf; for though the rock he grasped crumbled and gave way, it still sufficiently broke his fall to enable him to rest his feet in security.

A natural path, narrow, sometimes almost imperceptible, sometimes a mere shelf of shingle, now led downward; this path the Indian slowly and calmly followed, taking every precaution against any false step. The descent was laborious and fatiguing, but it was at length accomplished, and Chinchea was at the foot of the diminutive Niagara which formed the stream running round the Nest.

Without a pause, except to drink a draught of water, he commenced an ascent as painful and full of danger as the descent, but which, continuing with that indomitable perseverance so native to his character, he completed, so as to stand within a few yards of the fire beneath Live Oak Crest, in less than an hour after his departure from the window. Dangers, however, appeared to multiply rather than decrease.

The fire was built on a platform near the mouth of a cavern, with a screen of rock protecting it from the gaze of the Nest. It was composed of small branches of the live-oak, which emitted a crackling sound with much smoke, thus aiding the Indian in his stealthy progress toward the solitary man who now occupied a seat near at hand. His occupation was somewhat singular for one alone in the wilds. He was busily engaged in cooking, not such a meal as one man could reasonably be expected to consume, but a supper for a whole platoon.

Half a dozen ducks upon a ramrod, a huge earthen pot, from which something sent forth a most savory odor, a pile of sweet potatoes cooking in the embers, with a vast tur-

key turning upon a rude spit, formed the groundwork of the repast.

The cook, whose face was plainly visible to Chinchea, was an Indian of his own tribe, and in whose utter absorption in his task, in his vacant eye, luxurious chuckle, and heavy air, the half idiot was plainly to be traced. His nostrils snuffed the steam, which owed its origin to his own gastronomic ability, with intense satisfaction, while his large eyes glistened with an almost irresistible longing to fall to. Prudence or fear seemed, however, to restrain him, and he pursued his task with patience and gravity.

Suddenly Chinchea was upon him, with a howl like that of a famished panther; the other, in his terror, emitting a shriek which filled the air, and, though smothered by the wind to any one above, it was plainly heard at the Eagle's Nest. Chinchea had wound his arms round the startled cook, and cast him to the ground, ere he was scarcely aware of his enemy's presence, and in a moment stood over him, with waving tomahawk, and a mien which froze the very heart of his victim.

"The Leaping Panther," said the other, who was not so great a fool as he was cowardly and gluttonous—qualities which had caused his expulsion from his tribe—"is very brave; he will not take the blood of a slave."

"Ugh!" said the other, with ineffable disgust, "Chinchea wants not his blood, he would not stain his ax with so muddy a stream; the Leaping Panther is a man, and takes the life of men. But Anton must be dead until morning."

He then explained to the trembling cook that he must enter the cavern, where, gagged and bound, he was to pass the night; while he, the Leaping Panther, assuming his costume and mien, took upon himself also his duties and office. Anton, or Antonio, as the other had been called, finding that his life was to be spared, freely acquiesced, and after greedily devouring some food, he entered the cavern, at the very mouth of which he lay, gagged and bound, Chinchea having given him plainly to understand that, on the slightest sign from him of mere existence, though he himself perished, he would first meet his reward.

This done, the Wacco proceeded to conceal his arms, and so to disguise himself, as by that light to deceive those for whose eating the sumptuous woodland supper had been prepared. On seating himself, he assumed even the very look and expression of the unfortunate cook. Scarcely had he done so, ere several footsteps were heard descending from above, by the rude path which led to the summit of the Live Oak Crest. Chinchea gave a guttural hiss, to remind Anton to exercise prudence; and then busied himself in laying the well-cooked viands upon the rude dishes.

"Well, Anton," said the foremost of the party, the renowned Blackhawk himself, "are you quite ready? for I am. This besieging is hungry work."

"Ready," replied Chinchea.

"Be seated, gentlemen," said Blackhawk, addressing two white men and a young Indian chief.

"I do think, Pedro," remarked the chief, "that after the busy cares of the day, nothing is more delightful than to retire from one's position as a chief, and, with a few friends around, to enjoy the sociality of the supper-table."

"*Si! si!*" replied the Mexican bandit, with a grin: "supper is a very pleasant meal. It has one great merit; that as there is no exertion required after it, one can eat one's fill, without fear of its incommoding him."

"*Ma foi!*" said the third, a Frenchman, "quality, not quantity, for me—though I must say that I have never had better fare than in Texas."

"Because, Carcassin, in Texas one lives in the open air, one takes ample exercise, and, thunder!—why one can eat any thing, from prickly pears to a wild mustang."

"Horse very good," said the young Indian chief.

Chinchea quivered in every muscle.

"Why, that is as men think, Long Arm; for myself, I never could try it, though you savages are partial to the animal."

In conversation such as this, about an hour was consumed, during which the greater part of the fare provided followed the example of time—Chinchea contriving to come in for his share, despite his wonder and anxiety at the presence of the young Wacco chief, Long Arm. At length, however, even Pedro, the Mexican, seemed satisfied.

"Now, Anton, the whisky, and we will initiate our friend, Long Arm, into the mysteries of punch."

This was a puzzler, as Chinchea was quite ignorant of the place where the liquid fire was kept. He acted, however, with his usual decision, and clutching his knife, with which he never parted, he advanced to the mouth of the cavern.

"Where?" said he, in a low whisper.

"Inside," replied Anton.

Chinchea groped his way along, and following a passage some twenty yards long, he suddenly came upon a kind of room dimly lighted by an oil lamp, and in which were deposited several jars of various sizes, stolen from neighbouring planters and settlers.

But why pauses Chinchea? Why does his gaze become fixed, impassioned, stern? Why does he clutch his knife, and grind his teeth?

On a rude pallet, having cried herself to sleep, lay a young, beautiful, and exquisitely formed Indian girl. The tears were yet standing on her cheek, while her swollen features showed how violent had been her sobs and grief.

Chinchea took one glance, and snatching up a jar, he hurried back to the festive party.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER SUPPER.

WHEN the Indian regained the fire, the company had armed themselves with the usual after-supper pipe, and were apparently quite ready to enjoy the bacchanalian hours. Indeed, Chinchea received a polite intimation that if he did not make haste, he should go more rapidly down the hill, and alight in a warmer region than he had any taste for; threats and menaces were, however, alike to the Indian, who rapidly prepared the required beverage, and handed mugs all round, taking care that very little water entered into the composition.

"That's a regular stinger," said Blackhawk, having drained his goblet; "but go on, Long Arm, don't be afraid of it, it will do you a wonderful deal of good."

"Ugh!" replied the young chief, who appeared to entertain considerable doubts on that point, having caught a violent fit of coughing, the consequence of his inexperience. Determined, however, to be nowise behind the other, he forced himself, though with an ill grace, to swallow the fiery decoction."

"Now, Long Arm," said Blackhawk, with an almost imperceptible wink at his companions, "about this love affair of yours—are we to hear the story?"

"Ugh," grunted the Indian, savagely, "you have heard. The Rose of Day is the fairest girl in all the wigwams of the Waccos, and Long Arm loved—he would have given his life for her. He said in her ear, that he would hunt the bear to bring her furs, the deer to supply her with venison and moccasins, the mountain sheep for cloaks—but all in vain. She was betrothed, and the face of him she was to marry was ever before her."

"And who was this fellow?"

"The Leaping Panther, a great warrior."

"A braggart whom I long to punish, for filling the world so much with his impertinent name."

"He is a brave," replied the Indian, with a smile of pride, which he could not forbear, though speaking of a rival.

"Well, and where is he?"

"He is gone to see the land of the pale-face; his mother died on the field of battle, and he found friends with the whites."

At this point in the conversation Chinchea, having replenished the mugs out of which the party were drinking, rose and left the platform, making his way along the path by which he had arrived. On his upward journey he had seen the bright shining leaves of a plant, the stalks of which was invaluable to him now, and he was determined to seek it.

In ten minutes he returned, and passing the merry party—none of whom, wrapped in their calumets and drink, noticed his proceedings—he moved on one side with the whisky jar. He had stripped the stalk of its leaves, and

bore the plant, like a cane, in his hand. Taking his knife he made several incisions in the side of the weed, and gently pressing it, a light frothy liquid poured in a little stream into the spirit.

It was a deadly poison, but, mixed with the alcohol, it became merely a powerful and rapidly-acting narcotic.

This done, Chinchea rose, and as he did so he met the cold gray eye of his rival fixed upon him.

The recognition was mutual, but by no outward sign did Long Arm betray his discovery, though it was clear that he was much the worse for the quantity of drink he had imbibed.

"More drink, Anton, my boy," cried Blackhawk, "more drink. Fill high. Long Head—Arm, I mean—pull away, the liquor is immense. It is nectar, ambrosia"—

"Never heard of those names before, signor; what are they?" asked the Mexican.

"They are Greek for gin and whisky," replied Blackhawk in a rich Hibernian accent, though he could assume Indian and Yankee at will.

"Now Pedro and Carcassin, and you, Long Arm, ready with your bumpers. while I give a toast. You, Anton, blow your cloud a little further off."

Chinchea had lit a pipe, and was calmly smoking, and gazing on the scene with certainty as to the result.

"Fill, I say, and I'll conclude to give a toast, which you're all bound to drink."

"*Its diablement fort*," said Carcassin, who had sipped.

"So much the better, the subject is a strong one."

"Ready!" cried Blackhawk.

"Ready," replied Pedro.

"*Bon*," said Carcassin, making a desperate plunge forward, and in the act of picking himself up, half spilling his glass.

"Ugh," observed the Indian.

"Here's to The Rose of Day, and he who wins her."

"Hurrah!" cried the two whites, and the toast was drank with bumpers.

Chinchea ground his teeth, and swallowed a pint of tobacco-smoke.

"Ugh," growled Long Arm, exhibiting sundry signs of drunkenness, which were not far from precipitating him into the arms of the god.

"It works," whispered Blackhawk.

"Good," thought Chinchea.

Long Arm rolled backwards, gave a huge sigh, and was fast asleep.

"He is got rid of," muttered Blackhawk. "Did the fool think to bring that sweet girl among us and keep her to himself? Pshaw!"

"*Parbleu, non!*" muttered the Frenchman.

"Carcassin, you are drunk!" said Blackhawk, who was unsuccessfully endeavoring to insert the end of his pipe into his own mouth.

"*Et vous?*" asked Carcassin, slyly.

"Oh, I am all right, by St. Patrick, *mavourneen*," said Blackhawk, whose eyes were half shut.

"And what is the meaning of *mavourneen*?" asked Carcassin.

"It's Latin for my dear," replied the outlaw, raising himself, "and that puts me in mind of my little dear that's waiting for me in the cavern yonder. Tell me, Carcassin, why it is that when, hardened as we may be, we are about to commit a great crime, we feel a physical pain here—a dilation of the heart, a swelling of the muscles of the throat?"

"It is the working of conscience," said the Frenchman, dryly.

"Of what?" inquired Blackhawk, as if he had never heard of any such appurtenance.

"Of conscience," replied Carcassin, who had been educated for a priest; "which never departs from even such men as you and me, Blackhawk."

"You think, then," continued the outlaw, moodily, "that our acts are of such a black die? Why so? We are free men; we roam the world, and take what chance gives us; what more?"

"But chance neither gives us the lives of others, nor woman's honor," said Carcassin, sarcastically; "and we take both."

"You are growing moral," sneered the other.

"Not I; it is the whisky," replied the Frenchman; "it opens the heart, and wrings truth from the bottom of the well."

"Hear the philosopher, Pedro; what think you of him?"

The Mexican was fast asleep.

"The drink works potently to-night," mused the outlaw "it stupefies Pedro and the Indian; it weighs on my spirits, makes me sad and gloomy, and takes all heart away; the Frenchman it sets philosophizing. Egad, there's something in it, after all."

"So there is," muttered Anton.

"Who spoke?" said Blackhawk, looking toward the entrance of the cave.

"I," replied Chinchea, waving his hand menacingly at Anton.

"I say, Carcassin," continued the chief, "will you have another glass? Gone, too!"

Carcassin lay beside Pedro, both seemingly vying with each other in their attempts at nasal music.

"Well, sleep your fill. One more glass, and I go;" and Blackhawk, despite himself, shuddered.

"You have had enough," said Chinchea, gruffly.

"Speak for yourself, Anton—by the way, does the Rose still weep and deplore her fate. Does she still refuse the honor of mating with the Wolf of the Prairies?"

"She sleeps," said Chinchea.

"Thank St. Patrick," replied Blackhawk, drawing a long breath; "and now, Anton, fill high another bumper, and mind you what I said about Long Arm—pitch him over the rocks; everybody will believe he stumbled in a drunken fit. I say, Anton, I feel as if I were at home; my eyes shut of themselves. It's very dark; ah!"

The outlaw had fallen beside his companions.

Up rose Chinchea, his arms in his hands, and a stern purpose in his eye. He clutched his knife, and approached the robber. He knelt and gazed on his sleeping countenance.

"Bad pale-face," he muttered; "the Manitou has given me your life; but Chinchea scorns to take it away from a sleep-

ing man," and he took in his hands a long tress of the robber's hair, cut it, and laid it on his breast.

"Chinchea," hissed a voice in his ear.

The warrior turned slowly round.

The Long Arm stood there before him, pouring out upon the ground the drugged liquor which his rival had given to him.

"Chinchea is a great brave," said the young warrior, sadly, "and Long Arm is a boy, a squaw. The Rose of Day loves the Leaping Panther—the Leaping Panther has saved her; let him keep the life which is his."

"And Long Arm?"

"Will Chinchea call him friend?" continued the youth, thoroughly humiliated at the risk which his inconsiderate conduct had caused the woman he loved to endure, simply because she could not return his affection.

The hands of the two warriors were at once clasped in amity, and they entered the cave, from which, in ten minutes, they again emerged, leading forth the bewildered and half-sleeping Indian girl, whose joy and delight on being reunited to him she loved, was plainly visible in her whole demeanor.

With a parting warning to Anton, Chinchea turned into a narrow way which led round the bottom of the Live Oak Crest; and about two hundred yards distant, he lay down with his companions, to snatch a few hours' rest, in a thick and almost impassable grove of trees, where a bubbling spring burst forth, which, by many a winding way—some secret, some open—went to swell the cataract below

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONFERENCE.

ON the evening of the escape of Chinchea the storm continued its violence for some hours, and yet Edward, from causes which will hereafter be explained, preferred the open air in the little garden to which Alice had introduced him, to the comforts of the parlor of the Eagle's Nest, where Jones, Philip, Cephas Doyle and the other tenants of the locality, solaced themselves for some hours in conversation over the usual Texan evening amusements.

At length, the Mexicans and the usual inhabitants of the Nest, wearied with the excitement and fatigues of the day, retired to rest, leaving Stevens and Jones alone in the chamber. They, however, moved not; but after closing the doors, they drew near the huge and cheering fire, refilled their glasses, loaded a fresh pipe, and made every preparation for a private carouse.

For some time neither spoke. Their thoughts were evidently busy on some subject which was deeply interesting to their minds; and there they sat drinking and smoking, but holding no communion. At length, after about half an hour had elapsed, Stevens spoke rather in an audible whisper, addressed to himself, than with a view to be heard by his companion:

"It must be ours."

"At any price," added Jones, with an approving nod.

"What?" said Philip, raising his head, and gazing fiercely at the dwarf.

"Of course you know. If men will tempt their fellows, why they must pay the penalty."

"Who is tempting, and who is tempted?"

"Don Juan de Chagres comes here for shelter; nobody asked him to. His servants let out that he has a mine of wealth with him; nobody asked them to."

"Well?"

"Why, of course, he having brought this money here, here it must stay."

"Jones, I shall blow your brains out one of these days."

"No you won't," replied the dwarf, sneeringly.

"Why?"

"Because you are afraid."

"I afraid?"

"Afraid of ill-using a friend who speaks for your good. The fact is, Philip, I am tired of this wild life. It doesn't suit me at all, and I would have you think with me. Break up the Nest, realize all we have, and with as much as we can make, retire into the center of Mexico, and there live among our fellows."

"I, too, am weary of this life. It is too lonely—it leaves too much time for thought—too many memories are stirring in the stillness of the night. Yes! could I see Alice but mated, I would gladly leave here forever."

"As to Alice," said Jones, with his usual hesitating manner, "I have often told you."

"Then tell it not again. You! by whose hand—"

"Well, what?" said the other, fixing his little gray eyes on the speaker.

"Nothing—but you are the last man who should dare to have such a thought. This young sailor, now—"

"You think so?" replied Jones, savagely. "I hate the fellow, from his very face, and this would be another reason."

"I know not why," half-mused Stevens, "but I feel an irresistible longing toward that youth. His face softens me as I look upon it."

"He is the very image of—"

"Jones!" thundered Stevens, rising and grasping the other by the throat, "breathe but that name, and I cast you dead at my feet."

"Fool, that you are," cried the dwarf, who was half-choking. "I will drop the subject."

"Jones," continued Stevens, loosening his hold, "I have warned you before; let me not have to warn you again."

"Enough. Let us speak of the Mexican's gold."

"Go on," said Stevens.

"Well," said Jones, speaking slowly, firmly and distinctly; "this money must be ours. We take it; there is at once an outcry, Don Juan insists on searching the premises; his followers join him; Cephas Doyle and your young English friend join him, and so will our own people."

"Perfectly true," replied the other; "and by your own showing, it is best left alone."

"Not at all," continued Jones, coldly.

"What then?" said Philip Stevens, his face half-livid with emotion, while avarice glistened in his very eyes as he spoke.

"If Don Juan were dead, no outcry would take place against us. He is near the outer window, he leans out, he overbalances himself, and is killed."

"Speak plain," sneered the other.

"Then I say, he must die," said the dwarf.

"Who is to kill him?"

"We must."

"We! why not you?" insinuated Stevens.

"Because, my friend, it is necessary that in all matters of this kind we should both be fully equal."

"Idiot," said Stevens, "why should I betray you?"

"Why not?" replied the dwarf; "the reward is tempting."

"Jones, this man shall not die. He has claimed my protection, and he shall have it."

"You grow moral," said Jones, sullenly.

"No!" cried the other; "but enough blood has been shed. Sleeping or waking, the gory flood is before me. When I rise at morn, and gaze out upon the sky, I see blood in the very tints of dawn; the setting sun crimsones all nature with gore. I sleep, and I swim in oceans of the accursed—"

"I never dream," drawled the dwarf.

"'Tis well for you—but I do, and voices, as of the past, come pealing to my ears; and he cries, 'Give me back my life.'"

"He is very troublesome to you, Philip."

"'Tis twelve years ago, and I have seen and endured much since that day, but not one moment, one second, has he been from my side. At meals, he sits by my side; walking, he

walks behind ; hunting, he runs to the death ; fighting, he shields me from harm, that my torture may be longer. Jones, if I could recall that day, if I could be what I was up to that hour—though then not innocent—I would gladly suffer every misery of poverty, of starvation, of wo.”

“ Regrets are useless. All we can do is to try and make life as pleasant as possible while it lasts.”

“ How ?—by repentance and restitution ?”

“ I have no wish for a trial and halter,” replied the dwarf, with a contemptuous scowl.

“ Then how ?”

“ By adding to our means of enjoyment.”

“ And what means are there left us ?”

“ Gold,” said Jones, calmly “ gold, that buys every enjoyment.”

“ We have enough.”

“ Enough for here, but not enough to hold our heads high in towns among our fellow-men. Come, Philip, be advised ; listen to an old friend.”

“ I have listened too often.”

“ We have sunk ourselves deep enough in guilt ; we can go no deeper. Blood is on both our hands ; but we have been scarcely repaid for the trouble. A mine is now within our reach ; should we not be fools to refuse acceptance ? Besides, recollect how we were compelled to leave New Orleans for want of money. There we were happy, joined in every amusement, and held our heads high. But money failed, and we were compelled to fly.”

“ We were, and I hope yet to be revenged on those who shunned us when our poverty became apparent.”

“ You can at once. Possessed of this Mexican’s gold and jewels, we return to New Orleans, no longer with a mere paltry pittance, but with a fortune. What pride to overtop those who turned us from the hazard table, who shunned us in the streets, and called us adventurers and poor devils.”

“ Curse them. Remind me not of those days ; I would give years of my life to punish those scoundrels.”

“ Money will do it,” said the dwarf.

“ It will.”

“ And money alone.”

"This Mexican is rich?" inquired Stevens.

"Very rich," replied Jones.

"He is old."

"But a few years, perhaps months, to live."

"He will be missed by nobody," added Stevens.

"No man that dies is. A nine days' grief is all the best of us get from widow, children, mother."

For an hour the conference was continued, and after almost giving way to the insidious persuasions of his friend, Philip suddenly exclaimed: "I will decide nothing to-night. All shall depend on this young Englishman. If he shows any signs of paying earnest attentions to Alice, and there be a prospect of their union, my fate is decided. We part. I go to live in peace—where they dwell, for Heaven will take pity on me, and Alice will—"

"Never consent," added Jones.

"We shall see," and with these words they parted.

CHAPTER IX.

EDWARD AND MARGARETTA.

Two hours previous to the interview recorded between Jones and Philip, Edward Blake, according to agreement, wandered into the garden of the Eagle's Nest, to spend a quiet hour with Alice and Margaretta.

The moon was faintly glimmering in the sky, as Edward approached the seat on which Margaretta, in a pensive mood, sat smiling, as the young man came near.

"Good-evening, cavalier," said she, gayly.

"Good-evening, signora," replied Edward; "but where is our hostess?"

"Alice is with Don Juan," she said; "he has been unwell, and she has taken him some refreshment. I sat with him a while, but the room was close, and I came out here" Then, as if anxious to change the subject, she said:

"Have you such evenings in your country?"

"Rarely," he said; "but as I am not of those who find only faultiness in their own land, I will say, that I have seen as beautiful a night there as in any other part of the world."

"I should like to see your country, signor," she continued, gravely; "I have heard much of its power, and would fain know the truth."

Blake's heart beat quickly.

"It is a great country," he replied, "and though less grand than some of its oompeers, it can yet show front with the most picturesque."

"There is enough of native beauty here," said the Mexican; "it is not that I seek. I would find a land where my soul was free, where a woman is not a slave, to be given away at will; where parents, or proud relatives, have not the power to make a heart miserable for life."

"Can they do it anywhere?" said Edward, surprised.

"Can they?" replied the Mexican, with a hysteric laugh. "They can, and do it in my wretched country. There a woman, ere she be married, is a mere puppet without will, a thing to be tossed about with so many wretched dollars, as make-weight; a peg to hang a scheme upon. Two families are united in the bonds of friendship or interest, and this friendship or interest she is made the mere instrument for consolidating. If her partner be hateful, aged, a fool, it is no matter—she has no voice, no will. Tell me, signor, of country where such things are not, and there is my home."

"Signora, you speak warmly," Edward said, in tender tones.

"Because I feel," she exclaimed. "I am a Mexican, but I am a woman, and I know the day might have come when I might have loved, when I might have felt the affection which should bind me undyingly to a fellow-creature; and I know, too, that by the fearful power of custom, because I own a fortune, that I am doomed, and it can not be."

"Doomed!" he exclaimed, with an effort at gayety, "you, so young, so beautiful, talk of being doomed—"

"So young, so beautiful, you say," she replied, with a transient gleam of satisfaction, which she effectually prevented him from seeing; "here lies the evil. Were I not young, this ill might soon pass; were I ugly, I might less repine."

"Madam," said Edward, gravely, "I do not pretend to know your secret history, but I surely can not tell why one, with native charms like yours, with many and happy years before you, with wealth and fortune, should repine. Were I, a poor devil, to do so, I should scarcely think it out of place."

"And are you poor?" inquired Margaretta, fixing her large eyes pityingly upon him.

"I am poor, madam, very poor; but I have my sword and my honor, and I fear nothing."

"No! you may look around and choose where you will. You are poor; well, success waits for the brave, and then a rich and lovely wife may repair what fortune had before churlishly denied."

"A rich wife, if I could love her," said the young man, his face crimson with emotion, "would be a good gift of fortune; but if, when I choose, I love truly, I shall not ask her wealth."

"You would love for herself alone?" said Margaretta.

"I would."

"Happy woman!" muttered the Mexican, in faint tones, which, if not meant for his ear, reached it, and made his heart leap.

"Why happy woman?" he timidly inquired, fixing his eyes anxiously on the young woman's face, beside whom he was now seated.

"Did you hear me?" said the other, with a sigh: "because a woman who is loved for herself, whose fortune never tempted, whose lover cares but for her, is happier than a queen."

"Doubtless you may be as happy," remarked the young sailor.

"Never!"

"Why?"

"It is impossible," said Margaretta.

"Lady, you speak in enigmas."

"I speak the truth. But this is idle talk. I know not why I have indulged in it."

"It may not be so idle," replied Edward with a swelling heart.

"How so?"

"Forgive me, lady," he said; "I am as yet a stranger to you; we have been cast together by accident; we may in time know one another better—"

"What mean you, signor?" exclaimed the young Mexican, starting back in affright.

"I mean," said Edward, trembling with anxiety, "that I know not what to say—I would fain hope—"

"Hope what?"

"Madam," he exclaimed, "I will not say I love you, because I know you not enough; but this I can not refrain from uttering, that I know I shall."

"Sooner love hell itself," cried the girl, starting from her seat, pale with anguish, for Heaven knows whether she responded to his feelings or not; "sooner go and cast yourself headlong from the top of yonder block—sooner do any mad and terrible thing, than let your heart say you love me."

"Why, lady?"

"Signor, I felt wretched to-night, and I spoke freely, more freely than I should to you, a stranger; had I known that there was the bare chance of such an ending to our speech, I had not said one word. Young man, this is the last time we speak together. It might rob you, it would rob me forever of peace."

"Gracious heavens! lady! why this terror?"

"You speak, signor, to the wife of Don Juan de Chagres. Yes! it was my own wretched fate, being bound by force, to suit the will of a rich family, to wed a man nearly fifty years older than myself, that I foolishly complained of to you."

Edward Blake, pale, trembling, horror-struck, leaned against the wall for support.

"The wife—"

"Yes," said Margaretta, with assumed gayety, "you see before you the wife of the man you took so gallantly to be my father. This should I have said before, but own I am ever ashamed to say. So come, signor, your pretended passion, for surely it must pretended, will have no excuse now. Had I been a maiden, you might have feigned a sudden fit of love, and have kept up the joke; but as it is, excuse me if I

remind you that, in our country, such jokes sometimes end seriously. Jealousy is the passion of old men."

It would be difficult to tell if Margaretta felt or not as she spoke. But Blake was as yet unable even to hear what she said.

"The wife of Don Juan de Chagres?" he muttered, half-incoherently.

"Good God!" mused the Mexican; "and does he love me, then? Is it come to this so soon? Oh, wretched fate is mine. But though his forced bride, though dragged by violence to the altar, though I spat upon the ring, and called God to witness I was not his wife, yet in the world's eyes I am Donna Juanna de Chagres."

This was said with a proud and swelling mien, as if she remembered herself.

"Madam, I thank you for reminding me," said the young man. "I had hoped differently, when I thought you free. But," he added, solemnly, taking her hand in his, "fear me not, madam. I now am armed against myself. So quickly born, this love will as quickly die. With me, I feel there must be none for love to feed upon. There is none here, and I shall think of this evening as a dream."

In truth, so simple, and yet so right-minded, was the character of the young sailor, that with him the discovery he had made, as a matter of course, at once erased even the shadow of love from his heart, though it left that heart sorely vacant.

"Here comes Alice," said Edward.

"Welcome, our hostess," said Margaretta, half-gloomily.

"I am sorry not to have met you here before," said Alice, addressing Edward; "but as madame wished me to remain a while with her husband, while he dozed to sleep, I thought it a duty to comply."

Margaretta bit her lip. Why, it was difficult to tell.

"At length, however, you are come," said Edward, endeavoring to rouse himself; "and as 'tis said better late than never, I think I have a promise to perform."

"I think you have," replied Alice; "but as it is growing late, and Norah yonder points to tea—which remnant of civilization I indulge in—let us into the house, and then I will hear you with pleasure."

Edward Blake willingly acquiesced, though he observed as he came into the light, how Alice gazed curiously at his pallid countenance. Determined that she should have no cause for suspecting his untoward feelings, he at once roused himself, and began the narrative of his shipwreck, which he had promised to detail.

There is always eloquence in truth ; and when, therefore, a man tells of things which have happened to himself, he possesses a power of description, an animation, of which he is before scarcely cognizant. Thus was it with Edward ; for, rising with the occasion, his language became rich and glowing, his eyes beamed with light, his color came and went, and forgetting all but the event he was narrating, he swept on in a perfect hurricane of scenic power. His listeners heard him with rapt attention, and, as he ceased, from actual want of breath, they sat silent and anxious for the termination. So minute, however, was the young man in his details, that it was midnight ere the party broke up.

CHAPTER X.

THE ESCAPE.

FAIR and sunny was the morn, when Chinchea and his party prepared to brave the perils which surrounded them on their departure toward Camp Comanche, whither it was now doubly necessary he should arrive, both to bring the promised succor, and to place the Rose of Day in the safe-keeping of her parents, until he was prepared to unite her fortunes to his forever.

Chinchea led the way, erect, proud, in all the prelude of savage dignity. Long Arm, humbled by his own act, that of the forced abduction of the bride of another, walked behind, while the lovely Indian girl, all roses like the dawn, which she greeted merrily—more merrily than for many past days—came meekly in the rear.

At any other time, even the Indian might have been dis-

posed to revel in the beauty of nature, but now all his energies were devoted to the task of extricating himself from the difficult position in which he was placed. Clutching his rifle, and treading with almost noiseless footsteps, he skirted the thicket which had served to shelter him and his friends for the night, and brought himself thus facing the Eagle's Nest. He listened now with eager attention for any note of preparation on the part of the besiegers, within a few yards of whose position on the summit of the Eagle's Nest, he was about to climb, that being the only route by which he could hope to gain the plain.

"The pale-faces sleep," said Long Arm, with an uneasy contraction of the face, as if the memory of the past night were unpleasant to him; "the fire-water has filled their heads with dreams."

"Good," muttered Chinchua; "but they are snakes; they hide themselves in the grass, and may bite and not be seen."

"Ugh!"

"Let Long Arm go," said the chief, pointing to the path which led upward to the camp of the banditti, "and see what the white men do above. He will be safe; the chief of the pale-faces sleeps yet in the cavern mouth."

"Ugh!" replied the other, and loosening his tomahawk, he obeyed.

With this monosyllable, Long Arm, concealing under a careless mien his anxious feelings, moved slowly up the rugged path which led to the summit of the Live Oak Crest, in an opposite direction to that which Blackhawk had descended to his woodland supper.

"The Rose will wait yonder," continued the chief, tenderly, pointing to a huge sycamore, which could, behind its vast umbrageous head, shelter and conceal her.

"The Rose will wait," said the girl, with a smile—a smile which went manna-like to the heart of the warrior.

"Good."

This was all he said, and then treading softly, so as not to be heard, he moved toward the scene of the previous night's debauch, in order to discover if any movement, dangerous to his own plans, had as yet taken place in that quarter.

As he neared the spot, silence brooded over all. Nor voice, nor sound of life was heard, and when reaching a spot whence, without being seen, he could overlook all, the whole party presented the same aspect as when he had left them on the previous night. Blackhawk lay near the extinguished fire, his head thrown back, his arms stretched as if in a deep and heavy sleep, while Pedro and Carcassin were near at hand in a similar state.

Presently, however, the chief of the outlaws moved uneasily ; the chill morning air seemed slightly to affect him, and he gradually gained a sitting posture. His eyes opened slowly and with difficulty, and he gazed around as one who believed himself in a dream. After a while, the senses gained their sway, and he discovered the severed lock upon his breast, and Anton sitting upright at the entrance of the cave, his arms and legs bound, but the gag removed from his mouth.

"Anton," said the outlaw, "what means this?"

"Ugh!" grunted the Indian.

"Why, methought I went to sleep in the cave, and here, at cock-crow, I wake and find myself on the stony platform."

"Ugh!"

"Where is Long Arm?"

"Gone."

"And the Rose of Day?"

"Gone."

"Furies!" said the outlaw, springing up, and rushing at the throat of the unfortunate cook; "gone! how—when—where?"

"Chin—"

"Chin me no chin!" exclaimed the bandit, striking the crouching Indian furiously as he spoke; "where are they?"

"Gone with Chin—"

"Dolt! idiot! knave!" cried the Blackhawk, more furiously, "who told you this?"

"Chin—"

"Fool! who waited on me last night?"

"Chinchea!"

"Who is Chinchea?"

"The Leaping Parther."

"The Leaping Panther!" thundered the outlaw; "he here last night! Bearding me in my very den. But he and Long Arm are enemies!"

"They have buried the hatchet."

"And the Rose of Day?"

"Is with her own warrior—the flower of the Comanches."

"And am I to be tricked thus with impunity by a brutish red-skin? My very soul thickens at the thought. How they will laugh and jibe."

"Ugh!" said the sullen savage, scowling at the bandit, his soul writhing beneath the blow which the other had most unwisely inflicted.

Blackhawk had roused a lion which he would have some difficulty in putting down.

"But this is all idle," cried the chief; "action, not talk, will serve our turn. Pedro, Carcassin, awake."

"*Buenos noches*," muttered the Mexican; "*caramba! nuestra demonia*; who calls?"

"I."

"Who's I?" said the sleepy lieutenant, opening his eyes.

"Blackhawk," thundered the outlaw.

"Oh! what's the matter, that one can not sleep?"

"Matter! that devil Chinchea, the Leaping Panther, was here last night, bound our cook in the cave, took his place, drugged our liquor, laughed at us in his sleeve, and stole away with Long Arm and the Indian girl."

"*Bon!*" said the Frenchman; "here's some warm work."

"I like it," said Pedro.

"Which way went they?" asked the chief, addressing Anton.

"Ugh?" answered the sullen Indian, inquiringly.

"I say, idiot, dost hear; which way went they?"

"Down!" replied the irate Comanche, pointing in the direction whence the Leaping Panther had ascended on the previous night.

"Go," said Blackhawk, "bring down the whole band; if they be there, the foxes are caught in their own trap."

The two lieutenants sped forward on their errand, secretly delighted, as bad men ever are, at the annoyance which one of their own party was subject to.

"Good," muttered Chinchea; "now is my time.

With these words he turned to go; when glancing at the platform, a movement on the part of Anton at once riveted his attention.

Blackhawk was leaning on his gun, his back turned from the cave, near the mouth of which stood Anton. The bandit chief was musing on what had passed, and by the expression of his countenance, he was planning revenge upon those who had baffled his criminal designs.

Anton had in his hand a tomahawk, a huge, heavy thing, with which an ox could have been brained.

A scowl was upon the Indian's face; the rankling of the blows that he had received was still at his heart.

"Blackhawk is gone," thought Chinchea; "Anton will take his life."

The outlaw remained motionless where he stood, gazing vacantly upon the Eagle's Nest.

Stealthily, with serpent tread, on sped the Indian. Murder was in his eyes, revenge flashed from their glare.

"Good," said Chinchea, breathing heavily; "the bad man of the pale-faces will lose his scalp."

Still the Indian advanced, and still the chief remained motionless.

"Pale-face," whispered Chinchea, solemnly, "the happy hunting-ground now awaits you. The Manitou has stayed his course."

Still the Indian advanced, and now stood within a couple of yards of the outlaw, while in his right hand the avenging weapon was held, prepared for the blow.

"Take that, fool," exclaimed the white, who had seen all.

With these words he wheeled round; a sheet of flame, a report, and Anton was dead, falling without cry or groan.

"Idiot," muttered the bandit, turning again, and resuming his former position; "it was of your own seeking."

"Ugh," said Chinchea, letting his short rifle fall into the hollow of his hand, and taking aim at the cool and reckless ruffian. But at that moment the picture of the young Rose of Day presented itself, and prudence whispered that the fate of his party would certainly be death, if he avenged the slaughter of his countryman.

With a heavy heart, but a light and cautious step, he turned away to rejoin the Rose of Day, with whom he found Long Arm, who reported the path difficult but practicable. Chinchea at once led the way in the direction of the summit, taking the Indian girl by the hand, and aiding her in her ascent of the rough ground. A few moments brought them upon the camp of the enemy.

To their right was a dense growth of brushwood, thick, black, and impenetrable; in front, the sloping hill, leading to the vast illimitable prairies; to their left, the position of the outlaws, who had just been alarmed by the arrival of Pedro and Carcassin.

At a short distance, tethered and hobbled, grazed the horses of the bandits.

"Now, my lads, follow," cried Pedro; "the dogs are not far distant. We shall have rare sport."

"Turtle hunting," suggested Carcassin.

"And if we catch them?" said Pedro.

"A deep tragedy," answered Carcassin.

And all the banditti laugh in chorus.

"But the captain," said Pedro; "oh! oh! it was too good. He had smuggled the lass so nicely into the cavern; he had got Long Arm so gloriously drunk, and then. ah! ah! ah! he—got—drunk—himself."

"A perfect vaudeville," said Carcassin.

"Good as a play," laughed Pedro.

Again the robbers roared in chorus.

Without further parley, the robbers then vanished from the camp, pouring down the narrow path which led to the cave.

Behind remained Ben Smith and three Comanche Indians, young men, who had accompanied Long Arm in his ill-advised flight from the camp of his people. As soon as the rest were out of sight, Ben Smith, placing his arms near at hand, drew forth a pipe, and loading it, invited the Indians to follow his example. They, nothing loth, readily complied, and in a few moments were deeply immersed in discussing the mysteries of the exhilarating weed.

"Wake snakes and walk yer chawks," said Ben Smith, starting; and in his eagerness he nearly swallowed his short reed pipe; "what's what? A b'ar, I'm thinking."

At the same time an angry growl was heard to emanate from the adjoining thicket.

The Indians never moved, but continued smoking with even greater energy than ever.

"Well, that's cool, anyhow," said the Yankee, annoyed at being outdone in calm courage; "but it's a b'ar, I'll sw'ar."

A still more angry growl, much nearer to the group, aroused Smith's ire to the utmost.

"Well, I'm bound to say them Ingins is right away cool; but I'm not a-gwine to be made a meal for monsters. So here goes at the b'ar, slick!"

"My brother is wrong," said one of the Indians, calmly; "it is not a bear."

"Not a b'ar; well, I conclude you're cool; darn my old grandmother, tell Ben Smith *he* don't know a b'ar from—"

"A panther!"

"A panther?" cried Ben, moving uneasily; "no, it ain't a painter, is it?"

"The Leaping Panther," replied the Indians, rising simultaneously, and disarming and casting the American to the ground, almost ere he knew he was assaulted.

The keen ears of the Comanches had recognized the favorite signal of their beloved war-chief, and had, at his call, at once returned to their allegiance, and owned the power and tie which, in all parts of the world, is connected with the words "my country."

Ben Smith was so astounded at the assault which had been operated upon him by his three companions that he suffered himself to be thoroughly overpowered without resistance. At length, however, the Leaping Panther and his two companions emerged from the thicket.

"Away, brothers," said Chinchea, calmly; "pick the si best horses belonging to the white men. They can len them to an Indian whose feet are sore."

Away darted the warriors, obedient to the command of their leader, and eager to cover their former bad conduct by assiduity on the present occasion.

"And you're a-gwine to take them horses, are you?" said Ben Smith, with nonchalance; "you're quite welcome, for they ain't mine, I conclude."

Chinchea made no reply, waiting in a dignified, but keenly attentive attitude, for the horses to be brought up.

"Tell Blackhawk," said the chief, as six of the choicest horses—selected with keen and practiced eyes—were brought up, "tell him he is a coward and a knave. The Leaping Panther says so, and the Leaping Panther never lies. Tell him that when he killed the poor fool Anton, the eye of the Manitou was upon him, and that the Leaping Panther will avenge him."

"Oh, my," cried Ben, with no little astonishment, and at the same time with infinite disgust. "He ain't killed Anton, I reckon."

"The Blackhawk stoops low; he beats a poor Indian without a soul, and then kills him because he feels the blows. He is a coward."

"He is," thundered Ben, in genuine disgust, "and if ever I foller a feller as ain't more of a man any longer I'll turn nigger, and that's about the last thing any Christian man 'u'd wish to be."

"Good!" said Chinchea, "pale-face speaks like a man."

"A man too without a cross," replied Ben, "who ain't a-gwine to stand by and see a dark Indian murdered. Jumping Panther, I'm one of your'n, I sw'ar."

"Let the pale-face loose," said Chinchea.

"Well, that's kind," cried Big Ben, stretching his long limbs with infinite satisfaction: "and I'm bound to say that I'm a deal more light-hearted than when I owned the bloody-minded Blackhawk for a leader."

The party were all rapidly mounted, and then giving loose reins to the fresh and champing steeds, they coursed over the prairie in the direction of Camp Comanche.

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

ABOUT an hour before midnight, on the evening after the interview between Margaretta and Edward Blake, Alice sat alone in her chamber, ruminating on the passing scene. The young sailor had that evening been unusually gay and lively, had told merry tales of his adventures at home and abroad, and had made himself, in fact, exceedingly agreeable. He had, however, retired early, and his example was followed by the Mexican. Alice had been left alone, or at all events with the quiet, silent and unpretending negro girl seated on a chair at some distance from her side.

It was a lovely night—calm, sweet and serene. She lingered on the past, she dwelt upon the present, and then came the future, dim and undefined to all, and to none more than to herself. Where would she be, when another cycle of the sun came gently round? In this dreary solitude, surrounded by beings so little akin to her nature; or far away in the land of civilization with—?

Alice blushed rosy red, and then, she knew not why, came to her mind the thought that she liked not the Mexican. Why did she not like her? why did she shrink from her presence, and wish that she were not there? Why had she found them so stolid and so stern on the previous evening in the garden, and why had Edward so suddenly brightened up?

These were perplexing thoughts, and yet did Alice, in her simplicity of heart, wonder why they occupied her mind, for she had yet to learn how the events of these few days were bound up in her destiny. What was Edward or Margaretta to her? And yet she could not refrain from thinking that the young sailor who had so strangely come into the solitude of the Eagle's Nest, must be that perfection of mankind which girls are apt to consider to exist, and a feeling of real regret came upon her as she remembered how short was likely to be his stay.

"Come, Norah," said she, rising, as if anxious to drive away unwelcome and annoying thoughts, "let us out upon the block; it is a shame to be indoors on such a lovely night."

"Him berry cold, him 'spect," replied the negro girl.

"Cold," responded Alice.

"Him aiways cold arter dark," continued Norah, who was just then not romantically inclined.

"Well, if it be cold, we will not remain out long."

"Berry bell, Miss Als, him Norah quite ready."

With merely a deer-skin cloak thrown over their shoulders, and a broad-brimmed and loosely flapping straw hat, they went out into the garden, and ascending the ladder which led to the summit of the block, they seated themselves upon the carronades, and relapsed into silence.

Presently Alice sighed deeply.

"Alas!" she cried; "such typifies my fate. Across my path, sad, dark and weary, has come a momentary gleam, to fade away as sadly, as wholly, as yon truant meteor that has just fallen to the earth. Why is it so? Yesterday I was at peace with myself, my hopes were bounded by the fate which so strangely seemed to be mine, and I crushed within myself those aspirations which my birth, my family, my name—but that is gone; and now *he* has come here to show me brighter things, as the picture in a mirror, to fade and die."

Again was Alice silent.

"But," she continued, at length, "this is idle. I must school my foolish heart to think of him as I would of a stranger; I must laugh at his tales and remember not the gentle voice, the impassioned gesture, of his being; I must remember that never—no, never—can I mate my fate to any—"

"You call, Miss?" said Norah, starting from a slumber in which she was already indulging.

"No."

"Den sartin, me dream you call Norah!"

"Hush!" whispered Alice. "I see a movement on the cliff facing the portcullis. Stoop low, girl, the robbers will make a night attack, and we have no power of moving."

"Oh, my!"

"Stoop low, girl, I say; if we be seen, we shall be picked off by those bold and bad men."

"Dem debbles," muttered Norah, trembling.

"Would I could alarm the Nest; but to descend the ladder were fatal."

"Him be killed, sure as I'm a nigger."

"But see! they have a plank to throw across the narrow chasm; they will enter the courtyard, and we shall have dreadful work here, anon."

"Him Norah faint."

"Faint, child, when 'tis over," said Alice, whose firm, but feminine soul, forgetting self, grew bold and courageous, in the cause of the sleeping dwellers of the Nest; "they must be alarmed. Would I could fire one of these cannonades."

"Dat berry easy," said Norah.

"How, girl?"

"Him ole rope burn all night," replied the negress, pointing to a thick old rope, well tarred, which hung smoldering, in readiness for any emergency, and would last many hours.

"Use it, girl," said Alice, turning away.

"Him nebber could, Miss Als," half shrieked the negress.

"Then give it me," replied the young girl, who, however trembled as she took it; "it must be done. Good heavens! they are placing the plank across, and will enter the courtyard in a moment. How can I do it!—but I must."

"Oh, Miss Als."

"Remove the cover from the gun," cried Alice.

Norah removed it.

"Now, stand away girl," exclaimed Alice, with a hysteric laugh; and turning her head on one side, she applied the match, and fell, half fainting, on the block, while Norah gave a shrill scream.

A dozen rifles, aimed at the summit of the block, answered the report.

"Bravely done, Alice," cried the thundering voice of Philip Stevens; "awake, my lads, and drive back this hungry crew; give them their own again." The Nest was soon alive with its garrison, and the assailants at once withdrew, leaving their bridge as a trophy of their defeat.

"Come down, girl," said Stevens, as soon as the uproar was over; "your courage saved us."

"Good heavens, Miss Stevens," said Edward, assisting her to descend, "how came you on the block?"

"Why, I was sleepless, and somewhat contemplative, and so went up to gaze upon the night."

"When I left you, Miss Stevens," said Edward, "m~~e~~m~~o~~ught you were weary, and going to rest."

"Would you have a woman of the same mind for two minutes together?" replied Alice; "fie, you would have us reasonable!"

"Indeed would I," continued the sailor, "especially in regard to ascending blocks within range of an enemy's rifle."

This was said so naturally, and in so friendly a tone that nothing could have been thence construed; but to Alice, unused to such care, the young man's evincement of thoughtfulness was pleasing, and she was silent.

"I must really suppose," said Blake, after a brief pause, "that my rambling adventures must have set your thoughts roaming. I must be more wary of my tales of travels, or 'that I did steal away this old man's daughter,' in as far as her sedate habits are concerned, will be as true of me as of Othello."

Alice remembered that Othello stole away the old man's daughter's heart, and smiled.

"You smile," said Edward, who had taken her arm, and was walking up and down the garden, while a faint streak of dawn illuminated the sky; "but you may not find it a smiling matter. I have known more than one stay-at-home lass made crazy for foreign travel, by the 'yarns,' as we call them, of a traveled sailor."

"My mind led me to wish for travel only to my native land, and I do not think you will alter that wish, Mr. Brown."

"But your native land is England."

"It is."

"Near what port?"

"Mr. Brown," replied Alice, "I have told you before, that I have secrets—and that is one of them."

When they sat down to breakfast Edward met Margaretta, who observed (with a smile full of meaning, and at the same time with a shade of sadness on her brow), that the young sailor was almost exclusive in his assiduous attentions to the fair daughter of their host, whose gratification, though silent and subdued, was, however, apparent.

"A *pleasant* night you had of it," said the Mexican, with sufficient emphasis on the word to make it to all but Edward seem a gibe.

Edward grew grave, and scarcely answered.

"Pleasanter than you would think," said Alice, innocently enough; "for after the attack was over, the hours until morning sped swiftly along."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Philip Stevens; "is our friend's converse so very gay and pleasant?"

Alice blushed, and then laughed to hide her blush, and looked so pretty in her sweet and innocent confusion, that Edward thought her far more lovely than ever.

"Miss Stevens is complimentary," he said; "though knowing the fright she had received, I did my utmost to amuse her."

Philip, seeing that Alice was annoyed, here interposed, and adroitly drew attention another way

CHAPTER XII.

HOW BIG GRIDDLE VISITED THE NEST.

UNTIL the arrival of the looked-for succor to be brought by Chinchea, there was little hope of the attack diminishing in violence. The whole garrison, therefore, remained on the alert, and even Alice and her negro attendant, accompanied by Margaretta, kept a constant look-out. During the remainder of the day there was no further sign of the presence of an enemy. It wanted some two hours of sundown, and the whole party were collected on the raised terrace which commanded the drawbridge.

"Darn my old granny," suddenly exclaimed Doyle, "if there ain't Big Griddle, the New-town peddler!"

The whole party gazed eagerly out upon the prairie.

Mounted on a tall horse of more bone than flesh, and which wheezed perseveringly as it came along, sat a man who, in his whole attire, presented a strange and anomalous appearance. His steed seemed fitted to the rider, and the rider to the horse. The master wore a tall, steeple-crowned, white felt, bedizened with tags and tatters. On the rider's shoulders was a variegated mantle, that had saved all the stray patches, which otherwise had been undoubted rags; while his steed had a saddle-cloth of multifarious hues. The rider's boots were quite six inches above his knee, and had seen many a year of service—in this the horse's legs resembled their master's, being incased in a thick coating of mud, of much similar color to his rider's spatter-dashes. On they came, so glued one to the other, so compact, or completely one, so Centaur-like, that all who looked on, without knowing the man, were amazed and puzzled.

Whiz went bullets from the nearest cover. But the horse increased not his pace one jot, appearing to treat the hostile missiles with philosophic contempt.

"Who in the name of wonder," said Blake, "is this stranger who appears so anxious to gain shelter here?"

"And you ain't hearn tell o' Joe Griddle, Big Griddle, Griddle the peddler?" said Cephas Doyle, answering Edward's question; "why he's a nataral born carakter. He is the best hand at a yarn in all the west country, and will whip more cats, tell more lies, and eat more pork than any fellow in Texas."

By this time the object of this lucid description had reached the Nest, and was in the act of crossing the narrow bridge, without dismounting.

"Roast pig in the larder, good people," said he; "just what I smelt, inviting me to dine, as I came through the wood. It's a fact, but I sw'ar them thieving vagabones have sucked bacon for *their* breakfast, and I had—nothing for mine."

"There is plenty here," replied Philip, helping him to dismount, and bidding a man take his horse to the corral, where the cattle had consumed every article of food; while Jones eagerly looked to the closing up of the entrance.

"Well, I reckon you're above a bit soft," said Big Griddle, whose saturnine visage somewhat belied the merry, hearty tone of his voice, "to tell me there are plenty. But as you don't disguise it, just hand it out yar, for I jist want to enjoy the open air, a rare sauce for appetite, good people."

"Why, Big Griddle, my boy, are you been in the wars, that you look so black, or are you catched a cold, that your voice is so almighty soft?" inquired Cephas Doyle, looking curiously at him, and bent, it seemed, on drawing him out.

"What brute speaketh?" replied the peddler, irately, and even impatiently. "Big Griddle ain't in the habit of wars; no, nor of catching cold, neither. He would like to see a cold catch him, that's all; he'd be like a dirty, sneaking-faced Yankee I know, and pretty glad to let go."

A roar of laughter greeted the peddler's reply.

"Who *are* you speaking to?" asked Cephas Doyle, somewhat angrily.

"To you, my sharp-eyed, butter-eared friend."

"Do you know who I am, or have you forgotten me?"

"What! Big Griddle forget the bandy-legged tailor of Hous-ton? who made him a waistcoat out of seventeen pieces, each 'ig enough for a coat?"

"Tailor!" thundered Cephas Doyle, amid another volley of mirth; "I, Cephas Doyle, a tailor! Big Griddle, I am a free-born American, I am; and I ain't no tailor."

"Many free-born Yankees is, I expect. I do conclude, howsomever, that if all tailors were like you—"

"Big Griddle, you're drunk," said Cephas Doyle.

"You're another," replied the peddler, nodding at the same time to Norah, who had placed before him a wooden tray, covered with eatables and drinkables—roast pork and spruce beer forming the principal ingredients.

"Big Griddle!"

"Yes!"

"You are a liar!"

"Don't be alarmed, I've got a job for you," said the peddler, with a laugh; "and you shall do it, as sure as my name's Griddle."

"But it ain't," said Cephas Doyle, in a cold, sardonic tone, which drew the whole party, including Edward and the two women, hitherto standing aloof, round the tonguy combatants.

"What are the fool arter now?" replied the peddler, still eating his meal, but casting a wary eye around.

"I tell you," said the Yankee, with a gleam of horrible satisfaction, "you may have robbed, most likely have murdered Big Griddle, but you ain't him, though you are in his clothes, and *do* about a bit make him up."

"Then, who am I?" said the other, insolently.

"One, I expect, everybody will be very glad to see," exclaimed Cephas Doyle, tearing, at one grasp, wig, beard and hat from the false peddler.

"The BLOODY BLACKHAWK!" said one or two of those around.

"Harry!" cried Philip.

"Murder!" cried Jones, turning quite livid.

"Captain Coulter!" said Edward Blake, coldly.

"Heaven have mercy on him!" faintly exclaimed Alice.

"So I am found out," said the bandit, with a cold sneer; "I must say I thought myself a better actor. The blundering fool Doyle must betray me, too. Well, it can not, I supposed be helped. Glad to see you, Philip; and you, Jones; and you, Alice, dear."

The face of Philip was stern and pallid with passion; that of Jones white with fear, and scowling with hate.

"Harry Markham," said Philip, advancing, "*alias* Coulter, *alias* Blackhawk, for it appears you are that bloodthirsty hound, who has been thirsting these days past for our blood; you are now in our power."

"I rather think I am," said the other.

"And as surely as you are in our power, so surely must you pay the forfeit of your folly. For the present the wood-house will be your prison, until we decide your fate."

"He shall have a fair trial before all here," added Stevens, solemnly; "here, on this spot, in an hour hence, I, Philip Stevens, will arraign him as a thief, and a murderer."

Cephas Doyle and the rest seized the bandit, and dragged him to the small block-built out-house which was to serve for his prison, into which having thrust him they left him to his meditations.

"Now," said Stevens, "we have work fit only for men. Alice, take your guest to your chamber; this is no place for women."

Edward Blake was standing with his back to the speaker, and he noted a scornful smile on Alice's lip as she advanced to obey the mandate. To reach the garden, she had to pass between our hero and his host, and the young sailor, expecting a word of salutation, had turned to receive it. What was his surprise to see gentle Alice standing with sparkling eyes and menacing mien, before her father.

"Philip Stevens," said she in whispered tones—tones clear and distinct, which, however, reached the ears of one more than they were intended for—"lay one finger on him at your peril. I, Alice—"

"Hush, not that name, girl!" replied Philip, who was ghastly pale.

But she had said it, and Edward Blake, who alone had heard it—for Stevens turned away abruptly to catch the words—stood, as if rooted to the spot, chained, as it were, by some mysterious fascination. All was now clear to him as noonday sun, and the blood ran cold and chill in his veins, as he walked to the walls to hide his deep and awful emotion.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PRISONER.

"BLACKHAWK is now in our power," observed Philip Stevens, as, an hour later, the whole party, Edward Blake excepted, had congregated round him; "and it is for us to consider how we may best rid ourselves of one who is the scourge of the frontier; who steals our cattle without mercy, and who makes the woods not only unsafe for the women, but for the hunter in search of game. Jones, what say you?"

"Dead men trouble not the living," replied the coward, who believed in no safety from an enemy but death; "let him die. We may never have another chance."

"I thought as much," said Philip, with a sneer; "and you, y hearties?" addressing the men.

"Kill him! kill him!" was the unanimous answer

"Cephas Doyle, what advice give you?"

"Why, seein' he ain't an Ingin nor a nigger, I ain't for

cuttin' him off in this 'yar cool style, if so be as he ain't killed Big Griddle. If he have, I'm bound to strangle him."

"Then you are not for his death?" said Philip.

"Sartin not."

"Nor am I," said Philip, emphatically.

Edward Blake turned full round, and gazed in surprise on his host, near to whom he advanced.

"You look astonished, Mr. Brown."

"Not at all. I heard what *she* said."

"Who?" whispered Stevens, hurriedly; "my daughter?"

"Miss Alice," said Edward, with emphasis.

"What mean you?"

"Nothing. My words are very clear," replied Edward.

"Well, whatever it means, we can discuss it anon—in the mean time, Cephas Doyle, how purpose you finding if Big Griddle be dead or not?"

"I'm bound to go and see," replied Cephas.

"What, venture out among the vermin?"

"I tell you, Capt'n Stevens, if so be Blackhawk have killed Big Griddle, I'm bound to kill him; and when I says it, I reckon I mean it. It will soon be dark; and I'm sartin the varmint will be on the look-out for signals. Blackhawk ain't slipped his head into this noose for nothin', I expect. Well, I leave these diggins, and I go to the wood; and if I don't ferret out Big Griddle, if he are alive, he never smelt roast pork, that's all."

"A willful man will have his way, Cephas," replied Philip; "and since you will, you will. Meantime, do you, Jones, see that Blackhawk is safe; and if he has killed this peddler in cold blood, he shall die, though he were twice her—"

"Her what?" said Edward, hastily.

"You seem deeply interested in the girl, and watch with marvelous care all she says and does," continued Philip Stevens, with a smile, as they moved apart.

"I do," replied Edward, deeply gratified to find the other on the wrong tack, when his own indiscreet words might have led him on the right.

"You are frank, at all events, Mr. Brown," said Philip, with a quiet smile; "and Alice may well be proud of such a suitor."

"I said not that I was her suitor; I could not be, while so much of mystery hangs about herself and you."

"Mystery, Mr. Brown?"

"Mystery."

"In what way?"

"She is not your daughter, though she passes as such."

"Not my daughter, sir?"

She said as much just now," replied Blake, firmly.

True! true! poor thing, she never knew a parent's care," said Philip, mournfully; "but if she be not my child, can you blame me for taking a parent's place?"

"Certainly not," replied Edward, with a choking sensation in his throat, a tingling of the eyes, and a stern dilation of the nostrils; "but why call her Miss Stevens, when her name is—"

"What?" asked Philip, in a low, hushed, sad voice, while his face for a moment borrowed the fearful and terror-stricken expression of Jones'.

"Blake," replied the young man, in as careless a tone as he could assume, and pretending to light his pipe in order to conceal his intense emotion.

"Blake," said Philip, in a hushed whisper, glancing fearfully around into the nooks and corners of the building, "how came you to know that?"

"Said she not so?" replied Edward, calmly; though what was hid beneath his calm, he alone could tell.

"Ah! did she say so? But, young man, why these questions?" asked Philip, sternly, almost menacingly.

"Said you not I was her suitor, sir? If so, excuse my questions; they have a meaning."

"Mr. Brown, I know little of you, save that you carry a letter of good recommendation in your face, which, I know not why, excited, at the first glance my sympathy."

Blake shuddered fearfully, and, only by a violent effort, curbed his tongue.

"You appear to like my ward—I dote on her. Yes, sir, though, as you may one day learn, she be no relative of mine, and though from reasons between her, myself and our God—"

"And me," thought Edward to himself.

"She likes me not, I fain would see her happy. It is my one hope—and to bring that about I would peril my life and fortune. She has, perhaps, to blame me for much suffering, mental and bodily. No sacrifice, therefore, that I can make shall be too great to atone to her for whatever fault she has had to find in me."

Edward gazed in surprise on the owner of the Eagle's Nest; and a glance of pity stole upon his face, followed nowever, on the instant, by a look of scorn and undying hate, which Philip Stevens, wrapped in gloomy thought, saw not.

"Did she love you, and you her, you should know the history of my fortunes—you should be my confessor, and in your hands should be the means of reparation."

"There is, then, guilt?" said Edward, sternly.

"Are we not all guilty, Mr. Brown, in this world?"

"Ay, but some much more than others."

"Of these," said Philip Stevens, speaking more to himself than to the other, "I have been; and yet 'twas *he* that urged and did the deed. But, Mr. Brown—"

"*Mr. Blake!*" said, or rather hissed, the young sailor in his ear. "I, Edward Blake, or rather Sir Edward, son of Sir Hugh, who by your hand—"

"God of heaven!" cried Philip—pale, white, trembling—"have mercy on my guilty soul."

"You said just now 'twas *he* that did the deed. If so, there is yet pardon. But, mark me, Philip Stevens, this secret is between you and me. I have reasons for concealing my real name for some time longer. You have yet time to think of what to do. If you be not wholly guilty—if the accursed deed were not yours—you can clear yourself."

"How?" asked Stevens, horror-stricken.

"Let me, as a stranger, win her confidence; let me hear from her lips the story of *that night*."

"*That night!* Oh, God of mercy."

"And if, from mere confidence in one she loves, she tells me all, and you are exculpated, the guilt falls on other heads."

"Sir Edward, you shall hear it from her lips—the best of

all can clear me—not of guilt, but of the damned accursed deed.”

“Until she does, I must look upon you as guilty.”

“So be it,” groaned the other, whose resolution had wholly forsaken him.

“Then let us be as before. I, Mr. Brown to you and all. You my host.”

“As you will.”

“Here comes Cephas, bound on his wild expedition. My brain is on fire; action is needed, and I will accompany him,” said Blake.

“Just as you will.”

“Captain Cephas,” said Blake, “I am curious to see this peddler, who must be quite a character.”

“Rayther, I calculate,” replied Cephas; “spry and active as a *painter*, and cute as a Albany needle.”

“When start you?”

“In about ten minutes. Lord, Lord, won’t I and Griddle have a talk, I expect, when we two gits together? Darn my old skin, but it will be no mistake.”

“Have you known him long?” said Edward Blake, while Philip Stevens walked away toward the room where the party usually congregated at night.

“I reckon he see’d me first; for I warn’t above a fut high, and he wur the doctor as assisted me into this univarse, I’m bound to say, seein’ my old grandmother has told me so ever so many times.”

“Doctor!” said Blake, endeavoring to be amused, in order to draw his mind from the wild and startling thoughts that filled his soul; “why, he has many professions.”

“As many, as there are hairs in a bull’s tail,” replied Cephas; “an’ considering all things, that’s a deal, I reckon.”

“What is he besides a doctor?”

“Well, I guess he’ll tell more fortunes in a day, nor a Spanish peddler would in a month.”

Much amused with Doyle, and perceiving that there was stuff in the man worth bringing out, Blake, arming himself, prepared to accompany the Yankee in search of Big Grid-dle, from whose acquaintance he promised himself much **satisfaction**

CHAPTER XIV.

BIG GRIDDLE, THE PEDDLER.

GRIDDLE had, during his tour out west, heard tell, sometimes as a thing doubtful, that the Eagle's Nest was inhabited by a bold squatter and a numerous family. Now, as men and women were, in Big Griddle's eyes, but so many animated hedges whereon to hang peddling ware, or big eyes to look at his clocks, or as persons who might want his attendance—for he regarded all mankind as mere viaducts for the conveyance of his medicines—he determined that the indwellers of the habitation that bordered on the Cross Timbers, should no longer suffer from the want of his visit.

Strapping upon the back of his faithful animal an extra bale—taken from some well-contrived *cache*, known only to his beast and himself—doctor, *alias* peddler, *alias* Big Griddle, started accordingly in the direction of the region which he supposed likely to turn out a good investment.

As he went, his pack became lighter and his purse heavier, for no corner, no nook, nor cranny, where house or hut could perch, or sit hen-like, and hatch melancholy in the shade, was too remote for him.

His nose was as acute for a customer, as it was sharp for roast pork—sharp enough, as he would often playfully and facetiously remark, for vinegar sauce to his favorite dish, a pig at nurse—or rather unnaturally deprived of its lacteal nourishment.

Months, therefore, ensued between Griddle's coming to the decision, and his being able to carry it into effect—months which rendered necessary three distinct voyages to replenish his bale. He had reached the very verge of the prairie in which was situated the spot it was his ambition to gain; when, fatigued with his journey, and having mercy on his beast, toward which he entertained a perfectly pyladian friendship, he halted at the spring to drink, and perchance to discuss his morning meal, when his nose and eyes were at the

same time irresistibly assailed, and the double garrison of sight and smell were carried by storm.

"By my father's old huckleberry stump, sweet pork, by hokey! a remnant, a fag-end, a sample, the leavings of some dainty mortal, more nice than wise, though I say it that shouldn't, who am benefited by it; but still roast pork, by the head of the immortal Van Buren, General Jackson and the army of *the U—ni—tid States*," continued he, using his favorite oath, and dismounting, he opened a carefully corked gourd, accidentally left by one of the banditti; "brandy, by hokey!"

This was a *nasal* asservation, in a double sense, because he judged by the odor, and spoke through the nose; but before he proceeded to make assurance doubly sure, by the employment of any other faculty thereupon, he acted in some particulars with his accustomed circumspection.

Tying the bridle of his horse to a long rope, and having removed saddle and bale from its back, he allowed it the range of the lasso. The bale and purse were hoisted, by a leathern thong thrown over a branch into the the very thick of the boughs of the tree, which thong was then concealed behind the parasitical plants that crept up the huge trunk of the sycamore.

"Now I reckon I can eat," said Big Griddle, with a frightful grin, quite ogrian in its intensity. "Gen'ral Jackson and *the army of the U—ni—tid States*, but this pork is good. Puts me in mind of my Mrs. Griddle; she did used to fry a pork chop sry. Darn my old horse's sackcloth, but I should like to know how she gets on in the north. She must have increased the population of New Jeresy since I left;—and I not there. I suppose they sent for that darned old Whiffles, *the quack—ugh!* the brute. There's a state of things; one's *ow* family supporting the opposition! But, these women are *so* obstinate. I told her I'd be home on purpose, if she'd wait until next Christmas.

"Oh, my! that brandy is first chop; French, I *con—*clude. Well, I do think that 'ere tree's winking at me. Gen'ral Jackson and the army of *the U—ni—tid States*.

In this mumbling, incoherent manner, the old peddler went ~~on~~ until he had consumed the whole of the animal portion of

his supper, undiversified by any of the vegetable. He then applied himself to the brandy bottle, and to that universal weed, which King James hath counter-blasted with such determination and vigor. Speedily he found himself in that delightful state, when a man begins to have an acute perception of his being first cousin to royalty.

In this agreeable state was Big Griddle found by the rambling Blackhawk, when scouring the woods in search of Chinchea and the other fugitives; and knowing the peddler well—having cheated him more than once—he resolved to purloin his clothes and horse, and thus to obtain an entrance into the Nest. As he felt convinced the peddler had money and goods near at hand, he bound him fast to the tree; determined, as soon as the capture of the Eagle's Nest was effected, to return and force from the unfortunate huckster the confession of where his pack was concealed.

Big Griddle, when introduced to the reader—as evening was drawing on—had just awoke; the somniferous and stupefying effects of the quart and more of brandy he had imbibed, having hitherto bound him in heavy durance.

“Joe Griddle, my boy, this sarves you right, for drinking that catankerous brandy. Darn its old stockin.’ Well, I’d give the best clock out of Maine—though that ain’t offering much—to get loose from this here state of mortal petrification, I would. And my coat, lud! there’s all the pieces I’ve carried about as samples for this twenty years in that old coat; and the hat, my go-to-meetin’ hat, though go-to-meetin’s neither here nor there. And old Joe, my poor horse, here’s a fixin. I only wish I had the varmint, the unchristened coon, I’d make him suck his fingers without molasses. Talking o’ ’lasses puts me in mind of pork. Pork and ’lasses is a rare drink. I smell pork; ah, it’s only the odor.”

“You’re right, Griddle, my boy; I was bound to find you. Well, I never did expect to see you taking it cool like this.”

“Jist look out. I’m savage. If you’ve bin poking fun at me, you’re bound to pay for it,” said Griddle.

“I,” cried Cephas Doyle; “why, you’re drunk.”

“No,” said the peddler, “I have bin, but I ain’t jist now. But I smell a rat about these diggins; you’re Captain Cephas Doyle as was at Saba.”

"I am."

"Thin jist operate."

Cephas Doyle, assisted by Edward Blake, who could not repress a smile, now quickly loosed the knots that bound the peddler, during which operation they gave an account of the way in which the Nest had been imposed upon.

With the pack upon his shoulders, having removed it from its elevated position, the gaunt peddler, walking side by side with Edward and Cephas Doyle, went on his way rejoicing toward the Eagle's Nest, to reach which spot had cost him so adventurous a three months.

CHAPTER XV.

THE WAR-CRY.

ABOUT an hour after sunset, the Leaping Panther, who rode at the head of his party, drew rein, and halted by the edge of a pine-grove that offered both fuel and shelter.

"Camp here," said Chinchea, addressing himself to the white man, the loquacious Benjamin Smith, who was introduced so unceremoniously to our readers.

"First—chop," replied Ben, with a huge grin; "it are got jist all four wants—wood, water, sky, and airth. Only lug out somethin' a feller can jist dig his teeth into, and I'll swa'r it immense."

"Look," continued the Indian, pointing with his outstretched arm to the other side of the diminutive lake, where a black mass of rock rose perpendicularly; "good camp, no eyes see fire."

This was true.

The trees formed a crescent around a little bay, completely shutting out all observation of the camp, except exactly on the opposite side, and there, by the light of the pallid moon, could be discovered a perpendicular rock, rising from the water.

The fire was lit, the supper was being prepared by the

hands of the lovely Rose of Day, and all proceeded eminently to the satisfaction of the whole party.

"This are pleasanter than outlying with the bloody Blackhawk," remarked Smith; "he's a varmint I don't half like."

"Then why did the white man join him?" said Chinchea, dryly.

"Don't rile me," replied Ben, warmly, "for I can't jist say. Somehow or another, I fell in with thim fellows—but I have found 'em out in time."

"Ugh," said Chinchea, laying his finger on his lips.

All was still as death in an instant. Ben listened with all his ears, but could catch no sound.

"What is it?" he whispered, in cautious tones.

The Indian made no reply, but pointed to the lake with his raised finger.

"I can see nothing," said Ben.

"Did my brother ever see two moons?" asked Chinchea, after another brief silence.

"Never," replied Ben, indignantly, "nor no other man."

'But he will see two lights streaming on the lake.'

Ben now clearly perceived the reason of the Indian's caution. The halo cast by some blazing fire, spread its influence on the lake, and seemed to cross the rays of the moon, which poured its light toward the party.

"It moves," said Ben, after some minutes of careful observation. "It's thim Towachanies fire-fishing."

"Good," observed the Indian, approvingly.

"Thin we may expect raal warm work," said Ben.

"Ugh!" replied the Comanche, sententiously.

The whole party now moved silently away from the fire and concealed themselves within a few yards of its glare.

Chinchea and Ben skirted the edge of the little bay, and discovered the exact position of the cause of alarm.

"Towachanies!" said Chinchea, after a moment of quiet examination. About two hundred yards distant, on the pellucid waters of the lake, there were some dozen bark canoes, filled with Indians engaged in fishing.

"Hist!" replied Chinchea; "they are coming this way."

At the same moment the tiny fleet was impelled forward to within less than half their former distance.

A low and angry growl—that of the panther—again startled Ben, but a moment's reflection made him aware of whence it proceeded.

One by one, cautiously and stealthily, the whole party collected round Chinchea.

"Must we fight?" said Ben, calmly, at the same time cocking his long Tennessee rifle.

"Ugh!" replied Chinchea.

"Jist pass the word, then," said Ben.

"Hist!" again said Chinchea, with a low laugh; "Chinchea has lost his eyes—he can not see."

And he said a few words to his companions.

A combined yell, fearful and horrible beyond all hope of description, rent the air. It was the awful Comanche war-whoop. The effect was magical.

Again did the party on shore raise their voices, but it was in song; the cadence they sung was the war-cry of the Leaping Panther. Up rose the Indians all; cheerily burned the lights; on came the canoes, for the combined party of Comanche and Towachanie fishers recognized the favorite warrior of the former tribe!

CHAPTER XVI.

AN ESCAPE.

A DEEP and heavy silence had for hours hung over the whole of the Eagle's Nest; trusting to the watch-dogs, not even a sentinel had been placed upon the walls.

About an hour after midnight, the door of Alice's room opened, and she herself came forth, followed by the ever-faithful Norah. In her hand was a small lantern, the light of which she shaded as much as possible, anxious, it seemed, not to attract observation.

A few steps brought them to the door of the woodhouse, where Blackhawk was imprisoned.

"Hold the light," said Alice, "while I unbar the door."

"Berry well, Miss, berry well," replied Norah.

"Hold it up high," continued the fearless girl.

"Oh!" sighed Norah, as she saw Alice gradually remove the barrier between her and Blackhawk.

"Now give me the light, and follow," said Alice, as, gently pushing open the gate, she entered the woodhouse. "Speak not a word, lest you wake him suddenly."

"Oh!" groaned Norah aloud, in the full conviction that her last hour was come, and that she was about to become a martyr to her domestic devotion.

"He sleeps," said Alice; "wretched man! with such a fate before him, and such crimes upon his head. Can he know the reality of his position?"

On a pile of Indian corn husks, and wrapped in an old Mexican poncho, lay Blackhawk.

"Harry," said Alice, in a low but distinct whisper.

"Harry," repeated Alice—this time laying her hand heavily upon the unconscious man.

"Hist!" said the waking man, "where am I?"

"Not a word above your breath, if you value your life;" said Alice, laying her finger on her lips.

"Alice!"

"Yes, Alice; Harry Markham, Alice is here."

"For what?—why are you come?" exclaimed the bandit, rising.

"To save you from a death, I fear, richly deserved."

"To save?" cried the robber. "Good, kindly, generous Alice; ever the same."

"Much changed," said the girl, quietly; "but not as changed as you."

"Changed in what?" said Markham.

"Changed in heart," cried she; "changed from a little prattling child, as you knew me once in the old country, to a stern and resolute woman."

"You are not twenty, Alice," said he, with a smile.

"Young in years, but old in heart," replied she, sadly. "The few summers which have passed over my head have been bleak and stormy—time and trouble have laid a heavy hand upon me."

"Not worse than upon myself," said Markham.

"Ah! but your ills have been of your own seeking, Harry

and to you, chiefly, I owe the troublesome scenes which have chilled and blighted my bright hopes—nopes, perhaps, by far too bright to be realized.”

“Then why seek to save me?” said he, with a sneer.

“Because I do not wholly forget what once you were to me, and to all those who knew you.”

“But you no longer look upon me, then, as little Harry; who once called you his—” and the robber gave a meaning smile.

“Harry Markham, when I was a mere child, some nine years ago, you called me wife. I laughed at you then. Were you now as innocent as in those days, I should laugh at you still; but, as you are—”

“Say no more,” exclaimed the man, moodily; “it is but justice. Let us part.”

“To meet no more, I hope,” replied Alice.

“That depends on fate. But how am I to escape?”

Alice at once led the way, and the bandit soon succeeded in effecting his escape.

Alice then returned to her chamber, to meditate on the consequences of what she had done.

CHAPTER XVII.

A WELCOME ARRIVAL.

EARLY the next morning an excited and angry party were standing round the open door of the robber's prison. On the threshold was Stevens—his eyes flashing with passion, his face colorless, his thin lips quivering with emotion. His hand clutched his gun, and he was wrapped in thought.

“Gone!” said he, without paying attention to the fierce exclamation of Jones, for vengeance on the one who had let the prisoner escape.

Before this man Alice paused, and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

“Well?” said Jones.

“Would you hang me as well as kill my—?”

"Hush, in the name of God!" cried Jones, reeling and nearly falling: "who would hang you?"

"I gave freedom to Harry Markham; and I, therefore, am the traitor."

"You, girl?" cried Stevens, on whom Blake fixed his eyes with warning.

"Well, I *am* steel-strapped, chewed up, and ain't got a leg to stand on," said Big Griddle; "if you ain't the very spirit of Mrs. G.—By Jove, if I only wanted pig for breakfast, I had it for supper. It's jist the way of the gals. You'd have made a corpse of Blackhawk, darn his skin, but the gal saved his bacon. Ha! ha! good idea that. Ha! ha! jist kick me, or I'm bound to burst a-larfin'. Well, that is pokin' fun and no mistake."

"Well," said Stevens, who had caught the expression of Blake's eyes, "perhaps 'tis all for the best. This man's blood at all events, will not be on our hands."

"So ho, there!" cried a look-out from the summit of the block.

"What news?" replied Stevens.

"Injins," continued the look-out.

The whole party rushed toward the terrace, which overlooked the prairie, and there, on the edge of the forest, in the rich panoply of war-paint, and mounted on their small but sturdy nags, came a hundred warriors of the Comanche tribe, with Chinchea in advance.

"Give them welcome," shouted Stevens; "quick to the block, and up with the red flag of England; and you, Jones, hoist out the white one, open the gates and lower the bridge."

The greeting between Blake and Chinchea was sincere and hearty, and the Indian related his many adventures on the road toward the camp of his friends.

"And what has happened to my white brother?"

"Many things, Chinchea; more than I can tell you now. But I shall soon want the advice of a brave."

"Chinchea is ready," said the Indian.

"His brother knows it," continued Blake, "and will tell him all when the time comes."

"Good," said Chinchea. "My brother likes not this place. Will he go to the wigwam of his red friend?"

Now Blake knew that Chinchea was trying to find an excuse to return to the side of his dusky love, to celebrate the wedding he so long desired.

"Chinchea is right. I like not this place. To me the air is close and unwholesome; it smells of the charnel-house," replied Blake, gradually growing excited. "For days, doubts and fears have filled my mind; now there is no doubt; I must therefore stay and find out the secret of innocent blood being foully shed, and most base wrong being done. Chinchea, the secret of my life is here."

"Who has taken the scalp of a friend of my white brother?" said Chinchea; "the tomahawk of the Comanche shall take his in return."

"No, no, Chinchea, I will not have his life taken. In the hands of those who have a right to judge, will I place him, if my suspicions prove just."

Philip Stevens approached.

"Well, Mr. Brown, are you for a sally? We propose scouring the woods in search of the enemy, who will now doubtless beat a retreat."

"I am ready at a word," replied Blake.

"The white man is hasty," said Chinchea; "let the scouts move first, and see that the enemy be not hid in the grass, to fly up and bite like snakes."

"You are quite right, red-skin," said Stevens. "Whom will you dispatch?"

"None yet. Chinchea will wait until the night is come, and then he will go himself."

"Will you take a white man with you?" asked Stevens.

"Yes, him," said the Indian.

"I am quite agreeable," responded Blake—the person selected; "but let us go at once. Your cavalry can easily pour down to our rescue at the least alarm."

"Good—my white brother is very wise, and Chinchea will go."

The party was now arranged in proper order. The whole body of Indian horse were drawn up close to the Nest, while the whites were dispersed among them; leaving Big Griddle, Pietro, and the Mexicans with the women, to guard the cattle in the fort. The next requisite was for the two spies to gain

the wood, without being detected by any of those who might be watching their movements from the edge of the forest.

Chinchea at once devised a plan, and having given full directions to Blake, he proceeded to put it into execution. Selecting a dozen of the very fleetest horsemen, and those most gayly caparisoned, Blake and he, having stripped themselves of every unnecessary article of clothing, mounted behind two of the horsemen in the rear of the troop, and placed themselves so as to be unseen. These men, properly instructed, then swept madly down the slope, taking various directions, and skirted the wood, as if in search of enemies. The two who bore outlyers behind them, constantly darted in and out of the thick brush-wood, as if suspecting proximity to those they sought, but presently the whole gang, at a given signal, darted back and rejoined their companions.

It is, for the uses of this narrative, unnecessary to detail the incidents of the contest that followed, which, owing to Chinchea's sagacity, and the zeal of his warriors, ended in the literal extermination of the Blackfeet.

This ended the mission of the Comanche warriors, who returned to their villages on the Spanish Fork, well satisfied with their expedition and its rewards.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EDWARD BLAKE AND ALICE.

Two days afterward, Philip Stevens called a council of his companions.

"My friends," he said, after a short pause, "I have not called you idly together, but to learn what you will do to render me some assistance in an important matter. I am about to abandon the Eagle's Nest forever.

"What I assemble you for," continued Stevens, "is to learn who among you are willing to accompany me. The Brazos river is within ten miles, and on that I have a scow well

enough concealed to make sure of our finding it still. In this matter, how will *you* act Mr. Blake?"

Our hero started at hearing his real name thus inadvertently mentioned, while Jones looked scared and horror-struck. Alice, too, was agitated at the mention of that name. "I for one," said Blake, coldly, "am ready to accompany you."

"Thanks," replied Stevens; then, turning to the others, he received answers equally encouraging; so that in half-an-hour the departure was fully arranged.

Edward had concluded all that he had to attend to and, wandering out upon the terrace, he was about to give himself up to dreams of the past, when a graceful form glided to his side, and, looking up, he beheld Alice.

"You too," he said, "feel sorry to quit this place?"

"Ah no!" replied Alice, shaking her head; "but I wish to speak to you for a moment. I scarcely know why; but a few simple acts of yours—your starting so strangely once when you saw certain armorial bearings in a book of mine, and your coldness toward Jones and Mr. Stevens, combined with your having been addressed by him as Mr. Blake, have determined me to confide to you the mystery and secret of my history, which I will endeavor to relate:

"I was born, I believe, in a remote part of the north of Ireland. My father owned much property; but, having lost his wife in early days, he retired to his country seat, and, dismissing nearly all his servants, he lived on the tenth part of his income.

"The house in which we lived was situated in a lonely corner of open land, at no great distance from some hills, over which came, occasionally, riding on his shaggy pony, a little cousin, a lad of about ten, while I was about eight; he was my constant playmate. Son of my father's only brother, who was a poor country parson, my father always encouraged the prospect of a union between us, and often spoke of it, though we were mere children.

Suddenly, however, he fell ill; and so severe was the sickness, that it in some degree impaired the powers of a naturally strong mind. Taking advantage of this, some distant relatives of my father contrived to gain his favor, and they ~~even~~ ventured to relate to him reports injurious to my mother

So vile were their arts, that they succeeded in getting him to make a will entirely disinheriting me, and constituting them his heirs.

“ Gradually, however, his health and strength returned, and with it his soundness of mind, and that love and confidence in her he had espoused, which made him dismiss the calumniators, and revoke the will by another, which made me his sole inheritress. Unfortunately he still kept the extorted will in his possession, quite content with the existence of the one of later date which revoked it. .

“ A year passed away, and my father’s malady returned more violently than ever, and the physicians pronounced that he had not more than twenty-four hours to live. I slept in a room close to him, and about nine o’clock, one night, after I had been in bed an hour, I rose to go and look at my dying parent. I crept softly near his bed, and hiding behind the curtains, near the wall, between which and the bed I squeezed myself, I gazed with awful and agonizing interest, child as I was, on the ebbing life that was to leave me an orphan.

“ Suddenly, in the moonlight, I saw a shadow fall on the floor, and then another, as if two men were entering by the window.

“ I held my breath, and perceived that two men—armed with knives and pistols, and their faces covered with crape—had taken advantage of the unfastened window, to ascend into the apartment. One of the men was much taller than the other, who was short even to dwarfishness. Dreadfully alarmed, I would have shrieked out, but my tongue refused its office, and I saw the two men approach the bed.

“ ‘ Is that you, dear Hugh ?’ said my father, in a faint voice—he thought it was his brother—‘ You will soon be *Sir Hugh* I fear !’ I forgot to mention that my father was a baronet.

“ ‘ No,’ growled the dwarf ; ‘ it is not Hugh.’”

“ ‘ Who is it then ?’ said my father, rousing himself.

“ ‘ Harkee !’ hissed the dwarf, standing close by the bed, while the other gagged and blindfolded the sleeping nurse ; ‘ You have in your possession two wills. Where are they ?’

“ ‘ What want you with them ?’ said my father. ‘ Ah, I see ; you come from those vile Parkers, who hope to rob my child yet !’

“ ‘Now, Sir William, no palaver,’ said the dwarf, savagely, and holding his pistol cocked. ‘We have come here to earn a thousand pounds. We risk our lives—but the bait is tempting—the wills or death.’

“ ‘Pshaw,’ replied my father, faintly, ‘I am dying; you can but send me an hour sooner before the judgment-seat of God.’

“ ‘Fool,’ said the dwarf, in a bitter and sardonic tone, ‘do not tempt us— Ah, Stevens, see what is behind there!’ and the dwarf trembled like a leaf.

“ The tall man darted to the end of the bed, and dragged me forth, placing his hand coarsely on my mouth to prevent my shrieking. Despite my struggles, I was securely gagged and brought to my father’s bedside.

“ ‘Sir William,’ said the dwarf, with a grin, drawing me within my dear father’s sight, ‘the wills in five minutes, or I put this child to death before your eyes.’

“ My father looked inquiringly at the man, and in his cold, savage, and brutal, but cowardly face, he saw that he *could* murder an innocent child.

“ ‘Better let her be robbed,’ he groaned, ‘than deprived thus of life so young; besides, Hugh will protect her.’ He then directed them to a drawer in a room near at hand, where the wills were deposited.

“ ‘Go, Stevens, I will keep guard,’ said the dwarf.

“ The tall man, who was all along silent, and seemed little to relish the affair, moved slowly away.

“ The dwarf sat by the bedside, with me closely clutched, while his eye wandered round the room in search of plunder. Suddenly his glance fell on a mirror opposite, where plainly could be seen my father’s hand rising to the bell which hung by the bedside, and which communicated with the servants’ hall.

“ Like a tiger he turned upon his prey, and rage and fury I suppose, acting on his ferocious nature, he sprung at Sir William’s throat, and the wretched daughter saw her father murdered before her eyes.

“ At this moment the taller man entered; and discovering what had been done, a scene of violent altercation ensued. The tall man declared that he washed his hands of the deed.

“ ‘I joined in this foul business at your temptation, fiend ! to gain a rich reward. But I engaged only to frighten an old man, while you have shed his blood.’

“ ‘He would have alarmed the house, idiot !’ said the dwarf ! ‘but have you the will ?’

“ ‘Yes ; but I will have no more of this.’

“ ‘Stevens,’ muttered the dwarf, ‘if you retreat and betray me, you will betray yourself. The old man is dead, and Harry Markham is outside, who, if I but say the word, can *prove* that you alone entered.’

“The taller man seemed to think of this, and a conference was held. I discovered by this, that they were to receive one hundred pounds a year as long as they lived—they keeping the will in my favor as security for the payment. The murder having been accomplished, their plans were much changed, and they at once determined to take me with them.

“They accordingly lifted me up, half insensible, and lowered me into the arms of Harry Markham. His meeting with them was curious. Lurking about on one of his lawless expeditions, he saw them attempting to enter the house, and cried ‘shares of the plunder.’ They at once agreed, and he kept careful watch, smiling at his own good fortune.

“Leaving behind them the will in favor of my enemies, they brought with them that which secured me, besides carrying off much money and jewelry.

“One night, about ten days after the awful event, they took me by the hand, and, after warning me, at the peril of my life, not to breathe a word, they led me down toward the beach. A boat waited for them. I was placed in it ; then the taller man entered, and Jones was about to follow, when a dark figure sprang forward and seized him by the throat.

“ ‘I hold you--murderer--assassin !’ cried the stranger--. It was my uncle.

“ ‘Let go,’ said Jones, trembling in every limb.

“ ‘Never,’ shouted my uncle.

“ ‘Then take it, since you will,’ said Jones, and his murderous knife pierced the bosom of my uncle.

“For—oh—for a long, long time, I had no sense of what had happened. When I recovered consciousness, we were

In a French emigrant vessel, bound from Havre to Texas I had been a whole month delirious. I would have exposed the villains, but no one spoke a word of English, and even the tall man threatened my life, if I dared to betray them.

"We arrived in Texas, and at once proceeded here. Their money enabled them to have great assistance, and they erected this fort. The tall man, after my solemn pledge to reveal nothing until he gave me leave, always treated me kindly; he bought me books, music, a slave; and when we visited New Orleans, he did every thing in his power to compensate for his fearful wrongs. But the assassin was ever before me.

"At New Orleans, where the two hundred pounds was regularly sent, they quarreled with Harry Markham, who, not being in the secret of this remittance, cared not much for their company. For two years he has—having passed through every stage of crime—exercised the trade of an open robber, associating with the vilest of the vile, the refuse even of Texas. You know the rest."

"And Jones it was who killed my father?"

"Yes, Sir Edward," said Stevens, who now discovered himself; for, unseen and unnoticed, he had heard all, so wrapped were both speaker and listener. "It was Jones who killed your father. My hands are free from blood. May I dare to hope for pardon?"

"Edward, was I then right?" exclaimed Alice.

"Mr. Stevens," said Sir Edward Blake, "you shall be forgiven—nay, rewarded, on condition of your turning king's evidence."

"It shall be done!" exclaimed Stevens.

"And the will of my uncle?"

"Is safe."

"You must appear against these still viler fiends, who, to accomplish their foul ends, paid for murder."

"Any atonement I am ready for," said Stevens.

The young baronet advanced rapidly toward the large party, which was only waiting for a signal to mount, and selecting Jones at once, he seized him by the collar, while Stevens dextrously disarmed him.

"What means this violence?" said the ruffian.

"I, Sir Edward Blake, son of Sir Hugh, and nephew of Sir

William, arrest you for the murder of my father and my uncle. Struggle not—it is vain.”

Jones at these words bowed his head. He saw that his hour was come.

All arrangements being now complete, the long stream of horses and mules left the Nest on their journey. Philip Stevens did not start until fully five minutes after the rest of the party. Just as he joined them, Blake, turning around, saw by the smoke which curled along the side of the block, that Stevens had set fire to the place.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

ABOUT sunset the retreating children of the wilderness found themselves within one hundred yards of the Brazos river. Some at once began to prepare the evening meal, during which interval Stevens took the rest down to the water's edge, and after loosening a padlock that bound a chain to a tree, the scow was drawn forth upon the muddy waters of the long-flowing Brazos.

It was a long and wide flat-bottomed boat, drawing but little water, and a hundred men could have found place and shelter in it.

As soon as supper was concluded, the Mexicans and the men hired by Stevens, began loading the boat, while Jones was placed beneath a small deck in the very bows of the vessel.

Every care was now taken to avoid a surprise; the men lay round the fire, at a sufficient distance to avoid being seen, and the women retired to their cabin, while Doyle, Chinchea and Blake mounted guard on deck, concealed by the unshipped mast and sails.

Presently the guards, ever on the alert, discovered Blackhawk and his gang collected within pistol-shot of the encampment, which lay in the stillness of death. At this instant the

low and angry growl of the panther was heard; and next moment, a head—that of Doyle—was slowly raised from the scow, and a hasty sign was instantly exchanged with the Indian.

“Now,” said Chinchea, taking aim.

The rifle of Blake, Doyle and the Indian, spoke simultaneously, and a yell from the robbers told the fatal effect of the discharge. Revenge, however, seemed the uppermost feeling; for, darting forward, they were about to advance to hand-to-hand conflict, when a heavy discharge from the bank, near the scow, damped their impetuosity and drove them to cover.

During the confusion, Chinchea, Stevens, Doyle, Smith, Big Griddle, and four other white men, dropped over the side of the boat next to the river, and gained the forest in the opposite direction to the enemy.

With his rifle firmly clutched, Blake stood leaning against the cabin which contained Alice, when he received a blow upon the head which made him reel; and a second would have followed, when, close behind the young man was poured forth the hot flame, and the intruder fell headlong into the river. Blake, whose fall was only momentary, leveled his gun and fired, just as a crowd of ruffians ascended the deck, and prepared to overrun the vessel. They were more than thirty in number, and came tumbling furiously down the steps which led from the short upper to the lower deck. Blake, however, was now surrounded by his five dauntless comrades, three of whose guns were loaded, and sent forth their murderous discharge from behind a rampart of bales.

A dozen muskets and double-barreled guns were at their feet, all loaded, and next minute the whole party fired, amid yells of fury from the assailants, who immediately sprung to the summit of the cabin, as if about to fly.

Fresh arms were seized by Blake and his men, and again the air rung with the awful volley, this time followed by a discharge as terrible from the land. Taken between two fires, the bandits turned; but blood had been shed, and even Blake rushed forward to cut off their retreat. Every rifle was again loaded, and the contents poured upon the fugitives, not three of whom escaped from what now became a massacre.

The victors then sternly turned to examine the results. Eighteen dead men were found, and seven so severely wounded as to leave no hope. Among these were Blackhawk and Carcassin; the Mexican had perished. The victory had been earned without one death on the part of the defenders.

"Where is Alice?" said Harry Markham, feebly, "if indeed she will speak to him whom, as Blackhawk, she has so much dreaded."

"You are dying, wretched man," replied Alice, stepping forth from the cabin; "and death is too awful not to make us forget even crime."

"Mine has indeed been a sad career," groaned Markham.

"You are, I think, fully avenged, Sir Edward," muttered Stevens; "there is but my death wanted to have all the three destroyers of your early hopes crushed."

"Who speaks of Sir Edward?" said Markham.

"I am Sir Edward Blake, nephew of him you aided to rob and murder," replied the young man.

"Ah!" cried the other, gazing with terror upon him by the light of the glaring pine torches, "something whispered to me you were no stranger. But murder—no, I had no hand in it; that was all Jones' doing."

"It was all me—all me," shrieked Jones, in a thick voice. "But here I am, dying; give me water."

Blake, accompanied by several others, rushed to the end of the boat; and there, lying on the floor, lay the dwarf, bleeding to death from wounds received from the rifles of the bandits. On examination it was, however, found that no one wound was mortal, and Blake sternly insisted on their being bound up.

In another half-hour not one of the bandits remained alive, and at the earnest request of Alice, a grave was dug, in which her foster-brother was placed, far away from the land which gave him birth, without stick or stone to mark the lonely and desolate spot.

This solemn duty discharged, the whole party, wearied, fatigued, and exhausted, lay down to snatch that repose which they so much needed.

A sentinel was of course placed, but no sound again disturbed the stillness of the night.

At dawn of day, ere the morning meal was taken, the scow moved from the scene of so much carnage. Jones had received such a shock that it was evident he could not long survive.

The wretched man seemed aware of his awful state, and volunteered a full confession, which was carefully taken down in writing, all witnessing it. He lived, however, to reach Galveston, where the document was read to him in the presence of the several consuls; and, having been acquiesced in by the murderer, the officials affixed their signatures. At the end of a month, Alice and Sir Edward sailed for England, accompanied by Philip Stevens, and every document necessary to eject the unjust and unprincipled family who had robbed the orphan of her inheritance.

On their arrival in London, Sir Edward Blake visited a lawyer, and within ten days a letter, fully explaining all, with copies of all documents, was deposited with the utterly astonished family, who had defrauded Alice and caused the murder of her father.

Sir Edward was stern. His terms were awfully severe, for he wished to punish them as well as to right Alice. The terms were: the restoration of the property, one-half of the annual revenue for eleven years, in a lump, and a public confession in the public press, of their fraud and crimes.

They resisted. But the alternative of a trial was too much, and they at length consented to all; leaving the country forever, under assumed names, almost ere the terrible advertisements, which, far and wide, proclaimed their shame and the mercy of the injured, appeared.

Stevens, who had atoned for his guilt, as far as in his power, and whose penitence was sincere, still lives.

Alice and Edward were then united; and, taught in the great and trying school of adversity, their union was happy indeed.

THE END.

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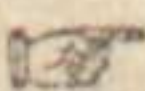
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